

Stages by Jessi (jessi_is_still_here)

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: F/F, F/M, M/M, Other

Language: English

Characters: Billy Hargrove, Dustin Henderson, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Erica Sinclair, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Original Female Character(s), Original Male Character(s), Robin Buckley, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

Relationships: Barbara "Barb" Holland/Original Female Character(s), Billy Hargrove/Original Female Character(s), Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler, Jonathan Byers/Original Female Character(s), Steve Harrington/Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington/Original Female Character(s)

Status: Completed

Published: 2021-03-04

Updated: 2021-03-04

Packaged: 2022-04-01 18:08:01

Rating: Mature

Warnings: Graphic Depictions Of Violence

Chapters: 25

Words: 79,893

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

1. Prologue

When Queenie's dad told her they were moving she didn't believe it at first. Their family has lived there in Texas for what seems like forever. Her disbelief continued until a few days before the move and her father yelled at her for not packing. The day of the move finally came, it was rainy. Queenie grabbed her polaroid and walkman before climbing up in the moving van beside her dad. She took a picture of the town sign as they left. Every state they entered and left she took pictures of their welcome signs. Texas, Arkansas, Missouri, Illinois, and, finally, Indiana. They drove all night finally arriving in their new home, Hawkins, in the early hours of the morning. Passing a welcome sign, Queenie took a picture of it. Suddenly her dad slammed on his brakes Queenie hitting the dash before looking up to see a deer. She lifted her polaroid and took a picture then the deer ran off.

They pulled up to a little, perfect house in the cutest cul-de-sac. Basically the exact type of place their little family didn't belong. This was a place where no one ever got hurt and no one ever had problems. Queenie took a picture of the house. They began unloading the truck taking box after box inside. After Queenie got everything important up to her room she began unpacking the plethora of boxes containing comic books, pictures, records, cassettes, and books. She sat up her stereo and turntable in one corner her bookshelves covering the rest of the room besides her bed. She put in her record of Hard Day's Night before beginning the process of shelving her books and comics. Once she got everything on the shelves, she began putting her pictures up. She hung them with clothespins across strings everywhere in the room. She hummed along as she hung the pictures.

"I don't care too much for money. Money can't buy me love." She sang hanging the last of her pictures. The record finished, and she went over choosing a Beach Boys one this time. She bobbed her head along as she went to hang up a curtain on her window. As she held it up she noticed four boys in the yard across from hers. She smiled taking their photo before hanging up the curtain. She grabbed her sunglasses and polaroid then ran downstairs and out the front door.

She took another picture of the four boys. She sniffed in deeply taking in the scent of late summer. It was cooler up here than Texas's summers. Queenie suddenly wishes she had grabbed a light jacket. She walked down the sidewalk a little before a girl stopped her. She had short red hair and glasses.

"You look a little out of place in Hawkins." She said.

Queenie touched her pinkish purpleish locks subconsciously opening her mouth to speak before the girl cut her off.

"I didn't mean it that way. I meant you seemed cool with your colored hair and I'd most definitely remember you-" the girl began getting cut off by Queenie sticking out her hand and saying. "It's fine. I just moved here from Texas with my dad. I'm Queenie."

"Barbara." She said shaking Queenie's hand. "I'm headed to my friend Nancy's if you'd like to come."

Queenie nodded following Barbara. She walked up to the house right across from Queenie's new one. The four boys were still out. Queenie raised her camera taking a picture of Barbara and the four boys as she walked up to the house.

"Who's that with you?" Asked a dark-haired boy.

"This is Queenie. She just moved here." Said Barbara as Queenie gave a small wave. Barbara turned to her. "This is Mike, Nancy's little brother, and his friends Lucas, Dustin, and Will."

The four boys waved at Queenie.

"I like your shirt." Said Dustin. She looked down having forgotten what shirt she was wearing. It was a Spiderman tee.

Queenie smiled. "Thanks." She took a photo of his lit up face.

"That's a nice camera." Said Will. "My brother is a photographer too."

Her face lit up. "I have to meet your brother!"

Will laughed at her enthusiasm. She took his picture.

"Why are you going to talk to my sister? You're much too cool to talk to her." Said Mike scathingly as Queenie took his photo.

She laughed.

"Why the colored hair?" Asked Lucas.

She shrugged taking Lucas's photo as he looked at her expectantly. Queenie looked at the five photos she had taken. She handed each photo to their rightful subject. "Here you guys can keep these. See you later."

Queenie followed Barbara through the front door up the stairs to what she assumes is Nancy's room. She looked at it in awe. It was a perfect girl's room. Queenie lifted my camera snapping a photo of it. A beautiful, dark-haired girl looked over at them confused. This must be Nancy.

"Hey Barb." She said. "Who's this?"

"I'm Queenie. I just moved in across the street." She replied shaking her hand.

"Oh yeah my mom saw your moving van and went to invite you guys over for dinner, but got no answer." Nancy said.

"My dad was probably asleep, he drove 17ish hours." She replied.

"Well my parents had planned this barbeque with the neighborhood and some other friends, so they thought they'd invite you guys." Nancy said. Queenie smiled. "I'll see if Dad's up to it, but I'll most definitely be there."

Nancy smiled. The next few hours were filled with girl talk and bonding. Queenie, Barbara, and Nancy all got along really well. Nancy was the epitome of the girl next door cliché. Barbara being the nerdy, but sweet cliché. And Queenie was the shy, but wild girl cliché. Queenie waved goodbye to the girls promising to see them later.

As she walked out the front door, she slammed into the body of a tall person.

"Oh, sorry." They both mumbled looking down. Queenie noticed a camera around their neck, and she smiled looking up.

Queenie's radiant smile threw Jonathan off for a second. "You must be Will's brother. He told me you were a photographer too. I'm Queenie Calabrese. My dad and I just moved here from Texas."

"Jonathan Byers, lived here my entire life." He said shaking her hand.

Queenie threw an arm around Jonathan. Jonathan tensed at the girl's sudden burst of physical interaction. "We have to be friends!" Queenie turned the lens towards the two of them and took a picture. The photo printed out and Queenie took it shaking it to reveal the two of them. Jonathan was looking at Queenie as if she was insane whilst Queenie smiled into the lense. She laughed. "Oh come on, Byers show a little bit of emotion!"

Jonathan gave her a pained smile. "Do you always impress yourself on people?"

She smiled almost laughing. "Only the worthwhile ones." She winked.

Jonathan sighed exasperatedly running his hand through his hair. "You are a bundle of energy, Calabrese."

"Only around certain people, I'm mainly shy and quiet." Queenie looked up at Jonathan almost regretting her enthusiasm. "Sorry for freaking you out. I just really need a friend in this new town."

"What about Nancy Wheeler?" He asked nodding to the house behind me.

"Nancy's great and so is Barbara, but they..." She trailed off wondering what was so off about them. "I think they have great intentions, but in reality they'd only make me angry trying to understand me."

He looks at her oddly before nodding in agreement. He smiled. "Well, then you've got a deal, Queenie."

"Huh?" She said confused. "Oh. Oh! Thanks, Jonathan." She wrapped her arms around him in a surprising hug.

Jonathan took a minute to hug back, but he finally returned it awkwardly.

"Sorry," Queenie mumbled breaking the hug and looking down. "Sorry." She walked away her head down. "Sorry."

Jonathan smiled to himself. "Nice hair, Calabrese!"

She turned back briefly. "Nice jacket, Byers."

Jonathan smiled to himself before walking down to the Wheelers basement. Little did he know the four boys had just watched the exchange between Queenie and him.

The four boys gave Jonathan mischievous smiles as he walked downstairs.

"What?" He asked.

"How do you feel about Queenie the new girl?" Asked Will snickering.

Jonathan blushed slightly before giving the boys a stern, teasing look. "Spying on people could get you in trouble."

The boys laughed.

Jonathan sighed rolling his eyes. "Ready Will?"

"Can he please stay for our barbeque!?" Exclaimed Mike.

"Yeah! Let's stay Jon!" Said Will, all four boys surrounding Jonathan begging.

He sighed. "Fine, just let me call mom."

The boys cheered.

Meanwhile, at the Calabrese household, Queenie was coming in the front door to her father snoring in a chair a halfway unpacked box in his lap.

She smiled taking the box from his lap before lightly shaking him awake.

He snorted jumping awake. Upon seeing his little girl, he smiled rubbing the sleep from his eyes. "Hey sweetheart," he stretched missing the box from his lap. "What is it?"

Queenie smiled. Romeo Calabrese is a writer, a reporter really. He still types a few books in his spare time. He was currently working on uncovering the corruption that lives in American small towns. "Our neighbors have invited us to a barbeque they're having tonight."

Romeo smiled. "I'll get to show these yanks how to use a grill."

Queenie laughed. "Be on your best behavior Dad." She scolded.

"I always am!" Her father complained waving her off teasingly.

Queenie laughed going up to her room to hang her newest pictures. She smiled at the one of Jonathan and her. They would be good friends. She could tell.

Later at the Wheelers barbeque, the Calabreses had arrived early since Romeo wanted to show Ted Wheeler his "mad grilling skills", as he had put it. Queenie had brought over a book to read, her camera (of course), and a jacket. She claimed a lawn chair in the Wheelers backyard. She curled up beginning to read her book unaware of anyone else at the party.

It wasn't long until people began arriving to the party. Nancy and Barbara occupied the two chairs beside Queenie including the new neighbor in their gossiping though Queenie's comments were few and far between.

"Well, I mean you've liked him for years," said Barbara. They had been talking about Steve Harrington, some boy Nancy liked.

"Steven sounds like a bit of a man whore." Queenie said absentmindedly turning the page of her book.

Nancy gave her a disappointed look before sighing. "Maybe he is."

Barbara and Queenie shared a small laugh. They fell into a comfortable silence when suddenly before the three girls stood a boy. In front of Barbara was Lucas. In front of Nancy was Dustin, and in

front of Queenie was Will. All three extended a hand to his respective lady. Queenie gave her two new friends a look telling them to accept before closing her book and letting Will lead her off.

She smiled at the younger boy. "Did Mike put you up to this?"

He smiled sweetly at me. "Nope. I was gonna ask you to dance no matter what."

Queenie smiled. "Good."

Will smirked. "So what do you think of my brother, Jonathan?"

Queenie's smile grew. "Jonathan is great! We're going to be best friends. I can feel it!"

Will laughed at Queenie's enthusiasm.

"I like you Will." She said then wrapped his head in a hug. "You are now mine."

Will looked surprised. "What?"

Ignoring Will, Queenie continued speaking. "In fact, all you boys are mine. I shall treat as my own family!"

"Wait what!?" Lucas exclaimed from Queenie's left.

"Oh hush," she said laughing slightly. "I have claimed y'all as my own." She bent down to Will's height whispering in his ear. "You're my favorite though." She whipped her camera around to take a picture of the two of them. She kisses Will's cheek as she does so. She takes the printed photo shaking it to reveal Will laughing into the camera as Queenie kisses his cheek.

"You're odd, Queenie Calabrese." said Will smiling at the picture.

"You have no idea, Will Byers." She said winking.

Romeo smiles at his daughter. "Daughter, you can't impress yourself onto everyone you meet in Hawkins."

Queenie chuckles looking up at her dad. "I haven't impressed myself on everyone, Father! So far just the Byers boys, the Wheeler children, Lucas, Barbara, and Dustin. That's only like-" She counted it out on her fingers. "That's only like eight people, Dad." She held up eight fingers to prove her point.

Romeo shook his head laughing. "Well no one can say you aren't your own person."

"I'm uniquely me and happy to be so." She said before making her way to a chuckling Jonathan at the edge of the party.

With Queenie no longer the center of attention the party-goers continued their previous affairs. Queenie feigns offense at Jonathan, her newly established best friend, laughing at her exploits.

"I can't believe you'd laugh at me, Jon!" She exclaims holding a hand over her heart in mock pain.

"Oh come on, Que. You can't seriously be upset about that!?" He says smiling at her words.

"I am, Jon!" She says sitting down in front of him to pout.

He sighs bending down beside her. "Come on, Queenie. You can't stay mad at me forever."

She huffs crossing her arms.

Jonathan smiles as he sits down beside her. "Roll?"

Queenie's face lights up taking the food from him. "You know the perfect way to a woman's heart, Jonathan Byers, through food." She tears off a piece and puts it in her mouth before offering another torn piece to Jonathan which he accepts.

"Yeah I don't think I've ever made it into any woman's heart." He said sitting back.

Queenie laughed. "Well either way I'm glad I met you, Jonathan."

"We literally met like two hours ago," he said taking another piece of

the roll.

"Jonathan, you gave me food. I will love you forever." She said in complete seriousness.

He rolled his eyes before falling into laughter. "You don't even know anything about me."

"That's the best part, I get to learn all types of new things about you." She said eating the final piece of the roll. "Knowing everything about someone is overrated."

"Why's that?" He asked looking at her curiously.

"Because this way I learn something new about you everyday." Queenie said smiling at him. "People, like the moon, are constantly changing. You never truly know someone unless you've seen all of their phases, and there are billions of them."

He nods. "That's really smart. How'd you learn so much about people?"

"Observation," Queenie replied. "And reading."

Jonathan smiled.

Queenie lightly touched her camera. "I carry this around because I'm an observer of humanity. I can't forget, I won't forget any of it." She paused staring at a blade of grass deep in thought before once again looking at Jonathan's face. "That's the difference between you and me. You're an artist. You carry your camera around because you have something to say. I'm a watcher. I carry my camera around because everyone else has something to say."

Jonathan smiled placing his hand atop hers. "Just because you give others a voice they wouldn't otherwise have doesn't make you any less of an artist. It just makes you a better person than the rest of us."

Queenie smiled. "Oh please, Jonathan, as if. I'm not this amazing, saintlike person."

"You starting to seem like it to me." He said smiling.

Queenie blushed looking down smiling to herself. "Thanks."

"Food's ready." Said Ted and Romeo from the grill.

Queenie popped up as quick as the Flash running to where the food line was leaving Jonathan in the dust. Jonathan chuckled to himself as he got up.

"So, Queenie Calabrese?" Nancy asked absentmindedly in Jonathan's ear causing him to jump.

His eyes landed on her giving her a confused look. Nancy Wheeler hardly ever talks to him. Why was she now?

Nancy must've noticed his silence because she spoke again. "Come on Jonathan don't act like we've never talked before. Our brothers are best friends." She smiled slightly trying to calm his confused look. "So, what do you think about Queenie?"

He shrugged not trusting himself to talk to the girl he's had a crush on for years now.

"She's a little odd," Nancy said sighing looking over to Queenie and the four boys. "But I think I like her." She smiled shifting her gaze to Jonathan once again. "She seems to like you."

Jonathan shrugged again. His heart was beating a mile a minute. What the two of them didn't notice was the subject of their conversation was now studying their mannerism with each other. Queenie smiled knowingly and took a picture of the two.

"Talk to you later, 'kay Jonathan." Said Nancy going to grab a bite to eat.

Jonathan nodded giving her a small half-hearted wave. He sighed before grabbing a plate himself. As soon as he sat down to eat, Queenie rushed over to him.

"I saw that!" She whispered excitedly.

Jonathan turned to her scared she had overheard the conversation.

She laughed. "Don't worry. She didn't notice, and I'll never tell."

Jonathan's scared look changed to one of confusion. "Tell what?"

Queenie rolled her eyes. "That you've got a crush on her! Don't worry, lover boy, I'm here to help now."

"What!?" Jonathan began shaking his head denying her words.

"Look even if you don't want to admit it, I see it." She said smiling. "So how long have you been hopelessly in love with Nancy Wheeler?"

"I'm not hopelessly in love with her." Jonathan grumbled.

"Okay, fine. How long have you liked her romantically?" She asked rolling her eyes.

He sighs somehow knowing she wouldn't give this up. "A while now."

"A long while?" She asked.

He shrugged.

"Be firm in your answers, Jonathan." Queenie commanded.

He nodded his head.

Queenie smiled. "I'll get you two together if it's the last thing I do!"

"Oh no you don't have to do that!" He exclaimed.

"I know, I don't have to," she said giggling. "I want to, Jon."

Jonathan shook his head. "You really shouldn't."

"Shut up, new best friend. I'm here to help." She replied smiling.

And Queenie didn't stop there. She became a permanent figure in their lives from that point on. She went shopping with Nancy and Barbara, played DnD with the boys, babysat the youngest Wheeler, and hung out with her best friend Jonathan. It wasn't long until school started and the fun filled (extra for Queenie) summer nights came to an end. It was quickly established at Hawkins High that

Queenie was the Geek to Jonathan's Freak. They didn't mind that people picked on them though Queenie was preoccupied with Operation Girl Next Door. This is what she had dubbed her efforts to get Jonathan and Nancy together.

Jonathan and Queenie were walking out of the fourth hour English when Queenie noticed Nancy. "Operation Girl Next Door is under go. Mission Description: Talk up "Designated Freak" to "Girl Next Door". I'm in pursuit of target."

Queenie started off maneuvering her way to Nancy before Jonathan grabbed her arm in annoyance. "Que, stop."

"Jon!? Why!?" She whined. "We're never going to get anywhere if you don't let me try to talk you up."

"Queenie what if I don't want you to talk me up?" Jonathan said exasperated.

"Nonsense!" She exclaimed.

Jonathan rolled his eyes trying to hold in a laugh.

Queenie smiled suddenly quieter. "It's fine, Jonathan. You don't have to. If I ever go over the edge just tell me."

"If you ever do go over the edge, I'll let you know." He said.

"So our plan tonight is still taking the boys around then head back to one of our places and watch a movie?" She asked.

He nodded. "Sounds good."

She smiled.

"Hey Queerie! You going to be the new freak on the block." Someone yelled behind them causing Queenie's smile to drop into a scowl.

She turned on her heel plastering a fake smile on her face. "Can I get a picture?"

He smirked. "Sweetheart, you can get anything you want." He

winked.

She scoffed. "Not that way. A picture of your face."

"Why?" He asked suddenly confused.

She lifted her camera as she said. "So I can make a truly terrifying mask." Click. "It's really too bad you have to deal with that every day of the year." She took the fully printed photo and began shaking it.

He scowled. "Bitch."

She smiled turning back around, taking Jonathan's arm, and leading him off.

"Why do you do things like that?" Asked Jonathan.

"I have to keep them in line." Replied Queenie.

He shakes his head at her before walking on.

That night they spent at Queenie's watching the Twilight Zone movie and talking. That was the last normal week in Hawkins.

2. Chapter 1: The Vanishing of Will Byers

"So what do you guys think?" Asked Nancy coming out in about the 400th outfit today.

Barb and Queenie gasped. "You look amazing!" Queenie exclaimed.

"That's most definitely the one." Agreed Barb nodding.

"Steve'll love it!" Queenie said.

"You really think so," asked Nancy still unsure.

"Nan," said Barb placing a hand on Nancy's shoulder. "He'll think you look great in anything you wear."

"Just buy it," said Queenie. "I wanna go!"

"Why are you so eager to leave?" Asked Nancy.

Barbara smirked. "She wants to go bother Jonathan at work."

"Of course!" She exclaimed. "What kind of best friend would I be if I let him work in peace!?"

Nancy and Barbara snorted.

Before long the three girls were en route toward home. Barbara dropped off Nancy and Queenie before continuing on to her own home.

"Bye guys!" Yelled Queenie running in her front door. "Hi Dad!"

"Hey Daughter how was shopping?" He asked.

She shrugged running upstairs. "As expected."

Queenie threw her bag down on her bed running to her stereo system. She turned on whatever tape she currently had in it. Her room filled with the sounds of Killer Queen by Queen. She smiled remembering when Dom used to call her that.

For the next few hours she finished up homework, listening to music and playing with the ends of her pink hair. Before long she looked up and saw the time. She smiled knowing Jonathan was working a later shift tonight because he took a coworkers shift. She grabbed a hat, her jacket and purse before heading downstairs.

"Hey Dad, I'm gonna go bother Jonathan at work." She said grabbing the car keys from the rack.

"Okay, have fun and stay safe." He said. "You know your curfew, young lady!"

"Yes, Dad, I'll be home!" She sighed.

The front door of the Calabrese household slammed behind her. Queenie got in the driver's seat navigating her way to the convenient store that Jonathan worked at.

She parked the car at the side of the building. Grabbing her purse she checked to make sure she didn't forget her wallet because she would feel bad if she didn't buy something. She smiled when she found it. She took the key out of the ignition turning the car off and getting out. She opened the door to the store being greeted by Jonathan's tired voice.

"Welcome to-" he looked up seeing Queenie. "Oh it's you."

She giggled. "Is that any way to greet your best friend?"

He rolled his eyes. "I hope you're gonna buy something, Queenie." He leaned across the counter.

She smiled sitting beside his head. "Maybe."

"Get your ass off the counter." He said stepping back.

She rolled her eyes before jumping down. "Fine."

Jonathan leaned back nervously tapping his fingers on the cash register. He opened his mouth to speak, but was cut off by the door opening.

Queenie casually turned from the counter to gaze at the aisle. The man doesn't take long to find what he needs pay then leave. Before he leaves he gives the two teenagers an odd look.

Queenie walks back up to Jonathan leaning across the counter. "Sooooo?"

"What?" He asked.

She shrugged grabbing a pack of gum off the rack. She opens it taking a piece.

"You know you have to pay for that," said Jonathan.

She smiled pulling out her wallet as Jonathan rung up the pack. "Ugh! Why do I have to pay for anything!?"

"Because I'd like to keep my job," he said.

She laughed sticking the piece of gum in her mouth. As her hand moved to her mouth her jacket sleeve rode up revealing scars on her wrist momentarily. Jonathan's eyes lingered on them only a moment before moving back to Queenie's face. She smiled at him, and he returned a sad one. "Jon, they're just old scars. I promise I'm clean."

He looked down sheepishly. "Sorry I just worry about you, Que."

"Good to know." She said. She moved away from the counter stretching tiredly.

Jonathan sighed. "You should really pick up some sleeping pills or something."

"I'm just worried about what they'd do to my tiny body." Said Queenie.

Jonathan nodded understanding.

Queenie sighed looking at her watch. "I should really go." She grabbed her stuff leaning across the counter awkwardly for a second before just stepping towards the door. "Pick me up at 7:30?"

Jonathan nodded smiling. "Like always."

Queenie arrived home to see Dustin, Lucas, and Will riding off on their bikes. She smiled at them yelling, "Be careful boys." She looked down at her watch noticing the time. "Oh shit! I gotta get in the house before dad kills me over curfew."

She slammed the front door shut behind her with a minute to spare. She sighed in relief.

"That cut it close, Queenie." Said Romeo Calabrese standing in front of her.

"I know, Dad, sorry." She replied.

"It's fine. I just want to make sure that you're okay." He said hugging his daughter.

"I know, Dad." She said smiling. "I love you even if you're overprotective."

Romeo scoffed. "I am not overprotective."

Queenie smiled. "You are, Dad, but I love you for it."

Romeo rolled his eyes going back to clean up the kitchen. Queenie hung the car keys on the rack. She walked up to her room, grabbed a book off her shelf, and sat down to read. Before long it was well past midnight. Sighing, Queenie turned off her light and tried to sleep. After an hour and a half of laying in bed without once feeling even remotely tired, she got up deciding to do something productive. She cleaned up her room trying to be a little more organized. She read a book. She listened to music having an elaborate dance party. Finally utterly bored she sat down in her desk chair and began spinning in it.

Queenie had barely gotten to sleep when she was woken up again from a horrible nightmare. She looked over at her clock pushing the dream out of her mind. She groaned it had been twenty minutes. Queenie dragged herself out of bed deciding it was close enough to time to get up that she could go make breakfast without much question from her father. See, Queenie had always been an insomniac. Well not necessarily an insomniac so much as nocturnal.

She slept fine during the day.

Queenie smiled to herself touching the crescent moon necklace hanging around her neck. She didn't dare read the inscription on it. That would bring back too many memories.

Queenie tiredly turned on the coffee maker preparing a pot. Queenie grabbed some eggs and bacon out of the fridge. She popped two pieces of bread in the toaster. She grabbed a pan and began frying up the eggs. Once she was done with two eggs, one for her and one for her dad, she fried up four pieces of bacon. The toast popped up as she was finishing the bacon. Queenie prepared two plates and mugs of coffee. She set up the table and grabbed the jams from the fridge.

Romeo Calabrese walked into the kitchen taking in the scent of breakfast. "It smells delicious." He smiled at his daughter cooking. "Good morning."

"Good morning." Queenie greeted.

Romeo smiled joining his daughter at the table. Queenie smiled back spreading blackberry jam on her toast. Romeo grabbed the apricot jam spreading it on his toast as his daughter took a tentative bite of her toast.

"Thank you for making breakfast." He said.

"Anytime Dad." She said through a mouthful.

The two enjoyed their breakfast in silence until their phone rang. "I'll get it," said Queenie crossing the kitchen to the phone on the wall.

"Hello," said Queenie putting the phone to her ear.

"Hi, Queenie." It was Joyce Byers.

"Oh what's up, Joyce?" She asked crossing an arm over her stomach.

"Queenie have either of you seen Will?" She asked.

"I saw him leave the Wheelers at about 9:28 last night." She replied shifting her weight. "Why?"

"Oh um Will wasn't in his room this morning." Joyce answered sounding worried. "I'm sure he j-

"Stop right there. You two stay where you are. Dad and I are on our way over." Said Queenie before ultimately hanging up not wanting to hear Joyce's argument.

"What was that about?" Asked Romeo.

"Will Byers is missing. We have to go over." She said running upstairs to change. She grabbed the nearest sweatpants and a tee shirt. She threw her curly hair up in a side ponytail not even bothering to brush it. She slipped on some old sneakers and grabbed her jacket.

Once Queenie was fully clothed she ran downstairs to meet her father at the door. Romeo grabbed the keys off the rack and ushered her outside. They left behind their not fully consumed breakfast and coffee only focusing on one thing: Will's safety.

The Calabreses made it to the Byerses in record time. The two Texans looked at each other one reliving a nightmare, the other overwhelmed with empathetic emotion. They ran up to the door knocking quickly before it was opened to reveal Jonathan still in pajamas. Queenie wrapped herself around her best friend. Jonathan held her embrace sinking into her. Once Jonathan let go, Queenie moved on to hug Joyce. The young woman held the older one until her silent sobs subsided.

Romeo stepped forward. "The first thing we have to do is establish a timeline." He guided Joyce to the couch and begin writing out a timeline for last night entitled Will. "Okay, so according to Queenie she saw Will, Lucas, and Dustin leave the Wheelers at 9:28 PM." As he spoke he wrote down what he was saying. The timeline now said '9:28 PM Will, Lucas, and Dustin leave the Wheelers on bike.' "So about what time would he usually arrive home?"

"Umm," Joyce shook her head. "Ten, fifteen minutes."

"So Will should've arrived home anywhere from 9:38 to 9:43 PM." He wrote that down. "So in between these two times is the active time."

"Active time?" Asked Joyce. "What does that mean?"

"Joyce calm down," said Romeo. "How often does Will get lost on his bike home?"

"N-never," she said shaking.

"So we can assume that he didn't get lost but was..."

"Taken," Jonathan finished. He stepped threateningly towards Romeo. "You're suggesting that my little brother was kidnapped. In Hawkins?"

"Not necessarily suggesting just covering all our bases." He replied.

Queenie put a hand on Jonathan's arm trying to calm him down. Jonathan looked at her warily. Queenie offered a small smile.

"Is there a certain door Will would've came in?" Asked Queenie quietly.

"Most likely the backdoor," said Joyce pointing to it.

Romeo went out to check the ground around the back steps. He was able to find a clear footprint in the dirt leading inside the house. "Hey, what is Will's shoe size?"

"Why do you need to know?" Asked Joyce.

"I found something." Romeo replied.

Joyce rushed out to see what he'd found.

Queenie turned to Jonathan. "Is there anywhere Will might've gone?"

He thought about it for a second before saying, "Castle Byers."

"Let's go check it out," said Queenie. "Make sure he isn't there."

Jonathan nodded running to his room to put on real pants and shoes. Once he was ready he took Queenie's hand and led her to the fort Will and he had made all those years ago.

"This place is amazing." Queenie said walking up to the little fort in

the woods. She pushed back the entrance allowing Jonathan to peer in.

"Will," he called. "Are you there buddy?"

"Will!" Queenie yelled. "Please Will are you out there!?" She cupped her hands over her mouth. "Will!"

"Will!" Jonathan's voice joined hers in the search.

They received no answer. Sighing sadly Jonathan and Queenie returned to the Byers's home.

The timeline had changed. Now they had established that Will did in fact arrive home on foot though. Most likely he was being chased by who or what they weren't sure. There was no sign of forced entry, so whatever it was either followed Will who left the door open or was able to open the unlocked door or it didn't follow Will inside the house which would've meant that Will went back outside. It wasn't long until Chief Hopper arrived. He took the Byers's statements as well as Queenie's from seeing the boys last night. He then sent his boys out to sweep the woods for any sign of Will. The Calabreses did not share their timeline with Hopper having a distrust in small town police forces.

It was almost third period when Jonathan and Queenie finally arrived at school. Neither of them could focus only thinking about Will's safety. Queenie smiled approaching Jonathan at lunch. The both of them had decided on working on some missing posters for Will.

"You coming to the search party tonight?" Jonathan asked as they worked out the layout of posters for Will.

"Of course, Jonathan, I'm not stopping until he's found." She replied.

Jonathan smiled gratefully at the pink haired girl next to him. "Thanks, Que."

"Anytime, Jon," she said.

Later that night in the pouring rain a search party for Will Byers was formed. They started where they found his bike and fanned out in the

woods. Queenie stayed as close to Jonathan as was accepted by society. Needless to say, the young girl was terrified. What if whoever took Will took her? Jonathan? Both of them? She could not go through the horrors again.

Soaked to the bone, Queenie and Jonathan called for Will taking the occasional pictures, Queenie taking more than Jonathan despite the possibility of them ruining in the rain. Queenie's pink hair now stuck to her face and neck making it almost impossible to see through. Queenie was shivering. Jonathan turned to her handing her his jacket. Queenie shook her head shoving it back towards him, but Jonathan didn't take it. Sighing Queenie wrapped it loosely around her shoulders. The jacket was still warm from Jonathan's body heat and Queenie couldn't deny that it felt amazing on her freezing body. She snuggled in closer.

When both of them were properly freezing and soaked, they made their way out of the woods. Arriving at the Byers, they shook off the cold rain. Jonathan grabbed towels from the bathroom as Queenie heated up the kettle for hot cocoa. Jonathan changed into dry clothes scouring his closet before finding some old sweatpants and a sweatshirt for Queenie. Again Queenie, being the polite girl she is, first refused Jonathan's act of kindness. Since she was shivering, Jonathan was not taking no as an answer. Blushing slightly Queenie took the clothes with a small "thank you" and went to the bathroom to change out of her wet clothes.

Upon her return Jonathan handed her a mug of hot cocoa. She happily took it throwing her wet clothes by her jacket at the door. She had wrapped her towel around her wet hair. Her cheeks were flushed pinker than the end of her hair. Jonathan's clothes hung off her making her appear smaller than she really is.

"So," Queenie began awkwardly.

Jonathan cracked a small smile shaking his head at her. "Que, you've spent all night looking for my brother practically glued to my side and now you feel awkward?"

"Fuck," she whispered. "I was hoping you wouldn't notice that." Queenie turned to him crossing her legs underneath herself. She took

a deep breath psyching herself up for the words she was about to speak. "Jonathan... I-I can trust you, right?"

Jonathan turned to her slightly worried. "Yeah."

"You deserve an explanation as to why I clung to you tonight." She said sighing. "God, I thought this would be easier."

"Take your time, Queenie. No rush," he replied.

Queenie smiled at him gratefully. "It's just... Back in Texas... When we were fifteen..."

"We?" Asked Jonathan.

Queenie looked at him wide-eyed realizing her mistake. She looked at him guiltily. "When I was born in 1966, a second one came after me. His name was Dominique, and he was my twin brother."

3. Chapter 2: The Weirdo On Maple Street

Queenie put the photo of Will and her from the Wheelers' barbeque back down. She couldn't believe that the sweet little Will was missing. Who the fuck would do this to him!? Looking out her window, she spotted Barbara's car. Since Jonathan is busy looking for Will, Barb and Nancy offered her a ride to school. Queenie tried to convince her dad to let her stay home and look for Will, but Romeo Calabrese wasn't having it. With Will missing and the possibility of a kidnapper being out there, Romeo wanted her somewhere with many witnesses and an easily trackable timeline. He had implemented after incident rules again. Queenie couldn't go anywhere alone. She has to call everytime she goes somewhere. Romeo has to know and trust who she is with. He has to know her every move.

Giving a half-hearted smile to Nancy and Barbara, Queenie climbed into the back of Barb's car. They rode to school in complete silence; Nancy studying flashcards, Barb driving dutifully giving nervous glances to Queenie in the backseat, and Queenie staring out the window hoping that Will was okay but already expecting the worse.

As the three girls walked through the hallway towards their lockers Barb quizzed Nancy with her flashcards. Queenie wasn't really paying attention still lost in her own thought. Queenie only looked up when Steve Harrington ripped the flashcards out of Barbara's hands. "Hey!" Nancy snapped as Tommy and Carol showed up.

Queenie rolled her eyes not having the energy to deal with these three today. "I don't know," Steve said. "I think you've studied enough, Nance."

"Steve," Nancy whined. Queenie side-stepped the bumbling fools and her friends opening her locker and gathering everything she'd need for her first period.

"I'm telling you, you know, you've got this." Steve said giving her a boost of confidence. Queenie allowed herself a small smile. Sure, Steve may be a total idiot like 98% of the time, but maybe he's not so bad for Nancy. She does need to learn to lighten up a bit. "Don't worry. Now, on to more important matters, my dad has left town on

conference and my mom's gone with him." Queenie rolled her eyes, so much for being not so bad. "Cause you know she doesn't trust him."

"Good call," Tommy added.

"So are you in?" Steve asked.

"In for what?" Nancy asked.

"No parents? Big house?" Carol said condescendingly.

"A party?" Nancy asked looking at them in disbelief.

"Ding! Ding! Ding!" Carol said as Tommy laughed. Queenie slammed her locker door having just about enough of this conversation. Don't any of these dinguses care that a kid is missing!?

"It's Tuesday," Nancy said trailing off.

"It's Tuesday," Tommy mocked as he and Carol laughed.

"Come on," Steve said. "It'll be lowkey. It'll just be us. What do you say? Are you in or are you out?"

"Um..." Before Nancy can finish thinking it over Carol interrupts her. "Oh God! Look!"

They look over to see Jonathan putting a missing poster for Will. "Oh God, that's depressing."

Queenie huffs having heard enough. "Just shut up! All of you! None of you know what it feels like to lose someone you love! A sibling! A friend! A parent! Why don't you go back to your nuclear families and your stupid ass party and leave Jon out of this!?" With a flip of her hair, she storms over to Jonathan giving him a small smile.

"Hey, Que," he says looking up to the group over her shoulder. "You're hanging out with strange people."

"Ignore them," Queenie says waving her hand dismissively. "How's the search going?"

"I'm going to go talk to my dad," Jonathan said. "See, if he's seen Will."

Queenie nodded. "I'd love to accompany you and help, but dad's got me on official lockdown."

Jonathan nodded grimly. "I'll keep you updated, Que." Queenie nodded turning away from him. "And Que?" He said causing the girl to turn around and face him again. "Thanks for everything you and your dad are doing. It helps a lot."

Queenie smiled nodding. "Of course, y'all are like family to us, and we'll stop at nothing until we find Will alive."

Jonathan gave her a small smile which Queenie returned before turning from him to rejoin the group. She walked to Barbara as Nancy replaced Queenie talking to Jonathan.

Queenie's day was filled with thoughts of Will and what he could be feeling at that exact moment, probably absolute terror, pain, and she didn't dare think of anything else. Barbara noticed the girl's demeanor and tried her best to comfort her friend. In any other event, Queenie would be delighted for the attention from Barb as she had a bit of a crush on the ginger-haired girl, but right now she really didn't want attention from anyone. After school, Barb took her and Nancy home. Nancy was still contemplating going to Steve's party or not.

Later that night, Queenie received a phone call from Nancy begging Queenie to accompany her and Barb to Steve's party. Queenie knew that her father wouldn't approve her going out to party with what happened to Will, but Nancy sounded desperate. Finally, after a lot of convincing, Queenie asked her dad if she could go over to Nancy's to study for a big test they had coming up and stay the night. Romeo was hesitant, but he finally agreed to allow her to stay at Nancy's. Queenie called Nancy back asking if she could stay over after the party. Nancy agreed most likely just happy to have her friends to go to the party with her. She left a note on her desk in her room that outlined where she really went. Hopefully that would be enough if something happened.

Within the hour, Queenie had gathered her clothes for the party a Queen shirt, spiked black heels, leather skinny pants, and a denim jacket. She wore what she wore for school that day to sneak past her dad towards Nancy's house. Once arriving at Nancy's Queenie did her makeup at Nancy's vanity while listening to whatever cassette Nance had playing. "So, this might sound absolutely horrible." Queenie said applying a thick layer of mascara on to her lashes. "But I'm kinda happy to get out and think about something else."

Nancy looked at the girl confused. "Really? I thought you'd be the most against it."

"I mean," Queen said putting down the mascara and admiring her smoky eye look. "Sure, it's in poor taste, but we're teenagers literally everything we do is in poor taste."

Nancy laughed. "I wouldn't say everything we do is in poor taste."

Queenie giggled before applying a bright red lipstick. She popped her lips. "Maybe not, but I'm here for you too, Nance. Jon isn't my only friend."

Nancy smiled. "Thanks for coming, Que. I know how you feel about lying to your dad."

Queenie paused in teasing her hair taking a gulp of air. "Yeah, but-"

Before Queenie could finish her sentence Barbara opened the door. Queenie gave her hair a few more sprays with the hairspray. "You two ready to go?"

Barbara sounded really annoyed. "Yeah." Nancy said.

"Give me a sec," Queenie teased a bit more of her hair and sprayed it again vigorously. "Okay," she grabbed the bag with her change of clothes. "I'm ready to go."

Barbara surveyed Queenie noticing something off immediately. She stepped closer to her friend smelling her breath. "Queenie, are you already drunk?"

Queenie shook her head. "I only took a few sips, just to get me in the

party mood."

"Queenie..." Barbara sighed sadly.

"Barb," Nancy complained. "It'll be fine. Now, let's go before my parents decide that I can't go."

Barbara nodded as the three girls headed out to her car. Once in the car, Queenie used Barbara's backseat as a changing booth. About three blocks from Steve's house Nancy told Barbara to pull over.

"What?" Barbara asked upset.

"Pull over!" Nancy insisted.

Barbara obliged pulling the car into park turning to Nancy in disbelief. "What are we doing here!? His house is three blocks away."

"We can't park in the driveway," said Nancy.

"Are you serious?" Barbara asked.

"Yeah," Nancy exclaimed. "The neighbors might see!"

"This is so stupid," Barb said going to pull her car back into drive. "I'm just gonna drop you two off."

"Calm down, Barb. Come on," Nancy snapped.

"If I have to go to this party you have to go," Queenie said from the backseat.

"You promised that you'd go," Nancy added. "We're gonna have a great time."

"He just wants to get in your pants!" Barb exclaimed.

"No, he doesn't," Nancy said laughing.

"I can confirm he does want to get in your pants," Queenie replied popping my head between them. "But why is that such a bad thing?" Barbara looked at Queenie shocked. "Sorry, I'll go back to saying nothing in the backseat." Queenie leaned back in the seat crossing her

arms.

"Look, Barb, you can be like my guardian." Nancy said smiling as she slips her sweater over her head. "Make sure I don't get drunk and do anything stupid."

Barbara sighs in defeat looking over at Nancy. "Is that a new bra?"

Nancy looks down guiltily. "No."

Once Nance was changed, the three of them got out walking the final three blocks to Steve. The walk in the dark scared Queenie, so she kept a tight grip on Barbara's arm. As they approached the house the girls could hear faint music. Nancy rang the doorbell.

"Barb, chill." Nancy told the nervous ginger.

"I'm chill," she replied.

Queenie snorted. "Sure, you are."

Both doors to the house swung open now able to hear the music fully. Steve Harrington stood in the doorway giving each girl a once over starting with Nancy, briefly glancing at Barbara, lingering slightly on Queenie, before ending with his eyes on Nancy again. "Hello, ladies."

Within a few minutes all the teenagers were joking and laughing poolside, Tommy was threatening to throw Carol into the pool. She was screaming in protest. Steve grabbed a beer shotgunning it. Barbara was not amused and didn't seem to be having an ounce of fun. Queenie was giggling at the sight in front of her a light cigarette hanging from her mouth.

As Steve finished sitting down Nancy said. "Is that supposed to impress me?"

"You're not?" Steve asked.

"You are a cliché you do realize that?" Nancy said smiling at him fondly.

"You are a cliché," Steve argued. "What with your grades and your

band practice."

Steve light his cigarette as Nancy laughed. "I'm so not in band."

"Okay, party girl," Steve said grabbing another beer. "Why don't you just, uh, show us how it's done then?"

"Okay," Nancy agreed smiling. Queenie took a drag of her cigarette smirking at the scene before her as the perfect Nancy Wheeler shotgunned a beer.

Letting the nicotine and alcohol get to her, Queenie joined in when the others start chanting chug. As Nancy finished it all except Barb gave shouts of approval. Nancy gave a little bow before looking to Queenie. "How 'bout you give it a try?"

Queenie smiled. "Oh wrong call, sweetheart. I grew up in Texas. That place is practically the definition of hold my beer watch this. I'm gonna wipe the floor with all y'all." Queenie took the beer from Nancy handing the Wheeler her cigarette before taking the knife. Queenie shotgunned the entire beer elucidating a large cheer from the others as she crushed the empty can on the side of her head. "And that's how it's done, ya yanks." She curtsied taking her cigarette back from Nancy. Both girls turned to Barb only to find her sitting unamused.

"Barb," Nancy said. "You wanna try?"

"What?" Barbara said looking at her surprised. "No."

Nancy grabbed another beer.

"No, no thanks." Barbara said.

"Come on, amore." Queenie said not realizing what she had called the girl in her inebriated state.

"Yeah..." Steve said trying to convince Barbara but not before giving Queenie a strange glance. "Come on, yeah."

"Nance, Que, I don't want to." Barbara whispered.

"It's fun." Nancy said standing in front of her now practically shoving the beer in her hand. "Just give it a-

"Nance," Barbara whispered with more force this time.

"Just... Just give it a shot." Nancy said handing her the beer and knife.

Rolling her eyes Barbara stood up. "Okay." She struggled to make a hole in the bottom of the can. "So you just..." The knife slipped cutting Barbara's hand severely.

"Are you okay?" Nancy asked panic rising.

"Yeah." Barbara answered hiding her hand from them.

"Barb, you're bleeding." Nancy said.

"I'm fine," Barbara said firmly.

"Amore, you are not fine." Queenie snapped. "Steve, where's your first aid kit?"

"In the bathroom, it's down past the kitchen to the left." Steve said getting up and pointing.

Queenie nodded. "Thanks. Come on, amore, let's go clean you up." Queenie led Barbara from the party outside towards Steve's bathroom.

The two girls walked in awkward silence before Queenie spoke up as they arrived in the bathroom. "Hey, Barb, I'm sorry that Nancy and I made you come."

"Que, it's okay." Barbara said looking down at her injured hand as Queenie ran some water over it.

"No, it's not!" Queen exclaimed finding some peroxide to put on it. "I came here hoping I could forget about what might be happening to Will for one night, but all I've done is drink to forget my problems and feel even more guilty for this night. I'm letting my friend down by partying while his little brother is missing. I'm letting my dad

down by not telling him the truth. He doesn't deserve to be put through that again. And most of all..." Queenie trailed off tears forming in her eyes as she wrapped gauze around Barb's injured hand. "I'm letting you down by letting myself get this way." Queenie looked down in shame struggling to tie the gauze.

Barbara took a deep breath. Queenie finally tied the gauze still unable to look Barbara in the eye. "Que, you're not letting me down. You're going through a lot more than you tell people." Barbara grabbed both sides of Queenie's face wiping her tears away. "You are strong even if you don't make the best choices to deal with your pain."

Queenie nodded leaning in to Barbara. Barbara leaned closer to her. They were slowly bridging the gap between the two before Queenie cleared her throat. "We should head back out to the party." Barbara nodded following Queenie back out towards the pool.

As the two girls walked back towards the party they saw Nancy, soaking wet, walking up the stairs. "Nance!" Barbara called. "Nancy. Where are you going?"

Nancy looked back at her innocently. "Nowhere. Just... upstairs. To change. I... fell in the pool." She laughed slightly.

Barbara and Queenie weren't buying her story. The only difference is Queenie couldn't care less. Barbara cared a lot.

Nancy's smile faded as Barbara looked at her in disbelief. "Why don't you go ahead and go home. I'll just... I'll get a ride or something."

"Nance..." Barbara said on the edge of tears.

"Barb..." Nancy said smiling. "I'm fine."

"This isn't you," Barbara mumbled.

"I'm fine," Nancy reiterated. "Just... go ahead and go home, okay?"

Nancy climbs up the rest of the stairs as Barbara scoffed to herself.

"Barb," Queenie implored. "I..."

"I don't need your sympathy, Queenie." Barbara snapped.

"Barb," Queenie said again desperately trying to connect with her.

"No!" Barbara yelled. "Just stop Queenie! You said it yourself! You're a horrible person for having fun and drinking while your best friend's little brother is missing! You're a horrible person for lying to your dad who just wants to keep you safe! And you know what, your behavior tonight!? It did disappoint me!"

Queenie stumbled back tears falling from her eyes now. "I'm sorry." Queenie ran off not noticing the instant regret on Barbara's face. Feeling at a loss Barbara went back outside sitting down on the side of the pool. Finding no other option, Queenie dropped down behind the counter in the kitchen sobs racking her entire body. Queenie cried until she heard a scream coming from the direction of the pool. Fearing the worst, Queenie jumped up running outside. "Barb!" She was hyperventilating. "No, no, no, no, no. BARB! Barbara! Please be okay! Please! Please! I can't... I don't.... NO!" Loud sobs racked her body. She was screaming hysterically. Unable to watch another second without stepping in, Jonathan stepped from his place in the bushes.

"Queenie," Jonathan snapped. The girl not hearing him still screaming no between the loud sobs. "QUEENIE!" Jonathan grabbed both sides of her arms.

Queenie looked around wildly before her eyes landed on Jonathan's. "Jon, what are you- You know what it doesn't matter. Where's Barb? Did you see her? We had a stupid fight, and she and Nancy had a fight. And now some kidnapper's taken her before I got to tell her I love her! And it's all my fault because I made her come with us! She didn't want to! Hell! I didn't even want to come! But I did because Nancy needed me! And now Barbara's gone! And I- I..." Queenie broke down into his arms.

"Hey," Jonathan said trying to comfort the girl. "Let's get you home."

Queenie shook her head. "I told my dad I was staying at Nancy's. I can't go home! Especially looking like this."

"Come on, Que," Jonathan said. "Let's get out of here." Jonathan led Queenie away from Steve's house into the woods towards his car. Jonathan put the upset Queenie in the passenger seat of his car driving her towards his place for the night.

Joyce didn't even bat an eye at Jonathan practically carrying in Queenie. Queenie washed her face, not even caring what her hair would look like tomorrow. She slipped off her heels, jean jacket, and leather pants. She started to pull off her shirt before remembering that she was at the Byers. She slipped into Jonathan room. "Hey."

Jonathan looked up from the pictures he had been studying. "Hey."

"First of all, thanks for saving me back at Steve's." Queenie said as Jonathan nodded. "And question. Where am I sleeping? Because I don't mind sleeping anywhere. Also can I take my shirt off or is that too much?"

Jonathan swallowed. "Que, you can take the bed if you want. And I can't make you keep your shirt on."

Queenie smiled sadly. "Jon, it's your bed, your room, and your house. I don't want to do anything that would make you uncomfortable. We can share the bed if you want, I don't mind. Of course, only if it's okay with you."

"Que, you're drunk," Jonathan said.

"It's okay, Jon," Queenie said. "I trust you."

"If you insist," Jonathan said moving the pictures off his bed as Queenie slipped the shirt over her head and climbed under the covers.

"Just a head's up," Queenie added snuggling further into the covers. "I have a hard time falling asleep."

Jonathan nodded in understanding. "We can stay up if you need to."

Queenie shook her head. "The alcohol is starting to get to me. I want to forget about tonight."

Jonathan nodded slipping his own shirt off before joining Queenie in his bed.

4. Chapter 3: Holly, Jolly

The next morning, Jonathan was awoken by his mother mumbling "Will..." He looked down at Queenie confirming that the girl was still sleeping before grabbing a shirt off the bedside table and running off to see what was going on. His sudden jolt out of bed roused Queenie from her slumber. Seeing that Jonathan was gone and hearing the faint mumbles of Joyce, Queenie grabbed her shirt off the ground and headed in the direction that Jonathan had gone. She didn't even care that she didn't have pants on. She just cared that Will might be back.

"Mom?" Jonathan asked looking at the woman sitting amongst lamps on Will's bed mumbling. Queenie stood behind Jonathan hiding in the shadows of the hallway.

"Jonathan!" Joyce said turning to her son. Joyce didn't notice the girl lingering the shadows past Jonathan's shoulders. "Come here. Come here." She stammered.

Jonathan slowly walked towards her gesturing to the lamps. "Mom, what is this?"

Queenie stepped into the doorway able to see the room now. "Queenie! Come here! Both of you, come here." Joyce stammered freaking the two teenagers out a bit, but they followed her order anyway.

"What's going on?" Jonathan asked as Joyce sat both teenagers down on each side of her holding on to their hands.

"It's Will." Joyce said dropping to a whisper. "It's Will. He's trying to talk to me."

"Miss Byers," Queenie mumbled fearing that the mother was having a breakdown.

"He's trying to talk to you?" Jonathan asked in disbelief.

"Yes, through..." Joyce gestured to the lamps tears in her eyes. "Through the lights."

"Joyce, please..." Queenie said tears forming in her own eyes as she gripped Joyce's hand tighter.

"Mom--" Jonathan shook his head.

"I know." Joyce said firmly. "I know. Just... just watch." Joyce stopped addressing the two and addressed the open air. "Will... your brother's here... and Queenie she's here. Can you show them what you showed me, baby? Please..."

The light in front of the three flickered. Joyce gasped pointing to it. "Did you see that?"

"Mom," Jonathan said sounding more and more distressed with each word. "It's the electricity. It's acting up. It's the same thing that fried the phone."

"No! It is not the electricity, Jonathan." Joyce yelled. Unsure of what she should do, Queenie squeezed Joyce's hand. "Something is going on here! Yesterday the wall--"

"What?" Jonathan yelled. "What about the wall?"

"I don't know. I don't know." Joyce took her hand from Queenie's throwing them up in frustration.

"Mom, first the lights, then the walls?"

"I just know that Will is here." Joyce stated looking to her eldest son.

"No, Mom," Jonathan's voice cracked with unshed tears.

"Maybe," Joyce stammered getting up. "Maybe if I get more lamps."

"No, Mom!" Jonathan said forcefully. "You don't need more lamps. You need to stop this, okay?"

Queenie bit her lip. "You need to talk to someone..."

Jonathan and Joyce turned to the girl that had been quiet throughout most of the exchange.

Queenie took a deep breath raising her voice slightly. "If you don't want to talk to a therapist, then please talk to my dad."

"Why would I talk to your dad?" Joyce asked her voice wavering still.

"Because," Queenie took a shaky breath holding back the tears. "You need to talk to someone who's been through this."

"Que, what do you mean?" Jonathan asked looking to his friend.

"Remember when I asked you if I could trust you and then I told you about my twin brother Dominique?" Jonathan nodded motioning for her to continue. "Well, the thing I was trying to tell you but never got around to telling you that night was..." Queenie took a deep breath sitting Joyce back down on the bed. "When we were fifteen, the day we turned fifteen to be exact, back in Texas, Dom and I were walking home from school. We lived in a small town everyone knew everyone, so it didn't matter that much. We had the same route home everyday from school. The two of us were happily walking home excitedly talking about our birthday plans when..." Queenie looked down a silent sob shaking her body. "This truck pulled up. The man driving we had seen before. He stopped us wishing us a happy birthday. Without thinking Dom approached the truck dragging me with him. When we made it to the driver's side to thank the man, two people jumped out of the bed. I remember something sweet smelling was shoved over my mouth and nose then everything was dark." Queenie looked down. "I woke up on the floor and... and..." Queenie burst into tears. Joyce wrapped her arms around the young woman.

"You don't have to continue, Queenie." Joyce mumbled into her shoulder.

"Thank you for sharing your story, Que." Jonathan said joining his mother in hugging her.

Queenie sniffed loudly wiping her tears away. "We'll find Will. In the meantime, please talk to my dad."

Joyce nodded. The three broke from their hug. "I'll go make breakfast." said Jonathan and the two women nodded in approval.

When Queenie and Jonathan got to school, Queenie went in search of Nancy planning to tell the girl what had happened to Barbara. Nancy deserved to know. Queenie found her at her locker with Steve. They seemed to be talking about something.

"Maybe now isn't the best time," Queenie mumbled to herself turning away and went to her locker. Queenie grabbed her books for first period and went to class despite the dreadful feeling in her stomach, telling her to just go home.

Queenie was unusually quiet the entire day. At lunch, she tried to tell Nancy again but saw her sitting with Steve, Tommy, and Carol. Queenie could live with Steve knowing but Tommy and Carol were taking it too far. The way Queenie got along with them so well last night, she couldn't bear herself let alone talk to them. Today, she was back full time looking for Will.

Queenie was unable to find a good time to talk to Nancy during the school day, now that it was over she was desperately looking for the Wheeler before she went home. Not telling Nancy was eating her up inside. Queenie sighed when she couldn't find the Wheeler and headed out to the parking lot. Upon arrival, Queenie found Nancy and Jonathan and Steve, Carol, Tommy, and Nicole. They were all gathered around Jonathan's car looking at pictures. Nancy looked like she had just arrived when Queenie approached the group.

"What's going on here?" Queenie asked at the same time as Nancy asked. "What?"

"This creep was spying on us last night," Carol said glaring at Jonathan. Nancy and Queenie gave Jonathan both a weary look. "He was probably gonna save this one for later." Carol handed the photo to Nancy smirking at Jonathan.

"See, you can tell that he knows it was wrong, but..." Steve walks up to Jonathan getting in his face. "Man, that's the thing about perverts..." Steve messes with Jonathan's shirt. "It's hardwired into them. You know, they just can't help themselves." Steve rips the photo in his hand as Tommy laughs. "So... we'll just have to take away his toy."

"Steve.." Nancy mumbles in a sort of protest. Queenie is in too much shock to react to anything going on around her. Queenie's mind is racing with feelings of betrayal and thoughts of why she didn't question what Jonathan was doing there last night.

"No, please, not the camera." Jonathan rushes forward but is held back by Tommy.

"No, no, wait, wait... Tommy, Tommy." Steve yells stopping his friend. "It's okay. Here you go, man."

The sound of glass breaking brought Queenie back to reality. Queenie looked down at the mess of photos and an expensive camera. She lifted her polaroid and took a photo. After everyone had left Queenie finally spoke up. "What the hell, Jonathan?"

Jonathan looked up at her from gathering the ripped up photos and pieces of his camera. The guilt was evident on his face. "Queenie..."

"No! You don't get to explain this one!" Queenie snapped. "I thought you were looking for Will!?"

"Isn't that what you said you'd be doing everyday until he was found!?" Jonathan accused immediately regretting his words.

"You weren't my only friend, Jonathan Byers." Queenie glared down at the man below her.

"Que..." Jonathan sighed. "I'm sorry, Que, but I-"

"You what?" Queenie crossed her arms expecting an answer.

"How- how do I fix this?" Jonathan asked.

"First of all, you stop following people around especially Nancy Wheeler." Queenie said. "Next, we find Will and Barb, alive. And finally, you realize that I'm still super pissed at you, but you're my ride home so let's go."

Jonathan hurried to start his car afraid that Queenie would storm out on him like the others had. They rode in silence until Jonathan pulled into Queenie's driveway.

"Que," Jonathan sighed not looking at the girl beside him. "I don't- I don't know why I took those pictures. I just I-"

"Jon," Queenie sighed looking over to him with a softened expression. "I understand. I've taken pictures of much worse: captivity... post-mortem... r-" She broke off into sobs. Jonathan placed a tentative hand on her shoulder. Queenie jerked away recomposing herself. "That doesn't make them okay or any less creepy though. So now that you've done it. Don't ever do it again. Learn from this, Jonathan. See you tomorrow to look for Will and Barb." She left his car marching up to her front door ready to await her father's wrath.

Romeo Calabrese opened the front door before Queenie could even get her keys out of her backpack. "I read your note you left on your desk. Explain yourself, figlia."

Queenie broke down into tears. "I'm so sorry, Papà. I'm so sorry that I lied to you. I'm sorry that I'm the worst daughter."

Romeo took his daughter into a tight hug. "Principessa, you aren't the worst daughter. Let's get you inside. I'll make you hot chocolate and peperonata di patate, and you can tell me everything that's happened."

Queenie nodded allowing her father to lead her inside their house. Queenie and Romeo sat in their living room eating the homemade chocolate and soup from mugs as Queenie told Romeo everything that had happened from the party to Barb's disappearance to the pictures Steve found in Jonathan's stuff.

"Oh principessa," Romeo mumbled moving a strand of purple-pink hair behind her ear. "It's been an eventful last twenty-four hours hasn't it?"

Queenie nodded tears coming to her eyes. "I just wish I could've done something."

"Come on," Romeo said helping his little girl up. "You said you wanted to tell Nancy but you couldn't, so let's go tell her, together."

The Calabreses walked across the street to the Wheeler's house not

expecting to see a concerned Karen and a crying Nancy.

"Nan," Queenie mumbled hugging her friend crying as well. "Something happened to Barb, something bad."

Nancy nodded in agreement. The two girls sat down with their parents and explained everything that the both of them knew. They did not care of the punishment they would face for lying.

As the girls relayed their story, they didn't realize that across town a body had been pulled from the lake. A body that was rumored to be the body of a boy, of one Will Byers.

5. Chapter 4: The Body

Romeo and Queenie were back home cleaning the dishes together with the radio on when they heard the news of Will's body being found. Everything stopped at that moment with one little news report. Queenie broke into tears and Romeo remained silent remembering a similar report for his twins when they went missing. Romeo wasn't sure why but the town they used to live in were quick to announce the missing twins dead. Anything to get Loreta to stop pursuing the case. Romeo thought back to his writing at the time. He had been investigating the corruption of that town's police departments and rigged elections. He always blamed himself for his twin's kidnapping. If he had just kept to himself, if his entire family had just kept to themselves.

Queenie didn't want to believe the news, but it had to be true. Will was gone. Her sobbing only intensified from that moment on.

Neither Calabrese got any sleep that night only sitting up in misery.

Once morning came, Queenie called to her father in what was left of her voice. "Papá, do I have to go to school?"

Romeo shook his head. He wrapped his arms around Queenie hugging her. The small family stood there just like that grieving for the young boy.

"Dad," Queenie mumbled.

Romeo looked down at her expectantly. "What is it principessa?"

"We're out of most foods," Queenie said.

Romeo nodded as the two changed to go into town for groceries. The drive was silent as the house had been for most of the night, save Queenie's sobs. As they drove through town, they saw Joyce Byers walking angrily down the street. The Calabreses shared a look before getting out to see what was wrong.

Jonathan had beaten them to that. They seemed to be arguing the

Calabreses approached the Byerses carefully.

"Yeah well while you're talking to the lights, the rest of us are having a funeral for Will," Jonathan yelled. "I'm not letting him sit in that freezer for another day!"

Romeo and Queenie nodded to each other before following Joyce and Jonathan respectively.

"Show's over," Jonathan said to the crowd that had gathered crying.

"Jon!" Queenie ran to catch up with him. "Jon." He stopped turning to her slightly. "Jon..." She rocketed into his arms holding him tightly. Jonathan let his tears fall as the girl hugged him tightly. "I'm here for you, Jon."

Jonathan let a small smile appear before more tears fell down his face. As they broke their hug the two friends walked down the street.

"Hey," Queenie said catching Jonathan's attention. "Let's get something to eat before we go to you know."

Jonathan nodded letting Queenie lead him to a diner. They ordered their food to go and Queenie drove Jonathan to a nearby park to eat. They sat in silence most of the time picking at their food. Queenie was holding Jonathan's hand drawing circles with her thumb in an attempt to calm him down.

"Jon," Queenie whispered her voice still not recovered from sobbing all night.

Jonathan didn't look up he continued staring straight ahead.

"Jon," Queenie tried again a little louder this time.

Still no answer from Jonathan not even a glance.

"Jon." Queenie said at normal volume this time.

"Everyone's staring at us," Jonathan mumbled not moving.

"Humans are like that with tragedy," Queenie said. "Gawking as if we

are at a zoo."

Jonathan leaned his head on her shoulder. "Thanks for being here, Que."

"Of course, Jon," Queenie said. "Where else would I be?"

They cleaned up from what little they had eaten and drove back in town to the funeral home. The man explained the different coffins to Jonathan as Queenie thought back to picking out coffins for her mother and brother. It brought tears to her eyes. Jonathan was doing his best to not cry. As they moved to look at more coffins, they saw Nancy in the doorway.

"C-can you just give us a second?" Jonathan asked the funeral director.

"Of course," he nodded. Queenie and Jonathan made their way over to Nancy.

"Hey," Jonathan said. Queenie just waved wiping some of her tears away.

"Hey," Nancy replied.

"Your parents they um they said you'd be here," Nancy mumbled.

Jonathan sniffed holding back his tears.

"I just..." Nancy took a deep breath. "Can we talk for a second?"

Jonathan nodded and led Nancy and Queenie to a bench in the forway of the funeral home. Nancy pulled out a ripped up photo asking Jonathan to look at something in the corner.

"It looks like it could be some kind of perspective distortion, but I wasn't using a wide angle." Jonathan said.

Queenie leaned over his shoulder looking at the picture taking it from him. "The ink could've ran, but..." she squinted looking closer at the picture. "There's most definitely something there. What the hell it is though," She handed the picture back to Nancy, "Your guess is as

good as mine."

"And you're sure you didn't see anyone else out there?" Nancy asked looking at them.

Queenie shook her head.

"Other than Queenie, no, no one else," Jonathan said. "And she was there one second, and then, um... gone. I figured she bolted."

"The way she screamed," Queenie shivered the sound feeling her ears again. "It haunts me."

"The cops think she ran away," Nancy said shaking her head. "But they don't know Barb. And I went back to Steve's... and I thought I... saw something. Some..." Nancy thought about her answer. "Weird man or... I don't know what it was."

"Whoa," Queenie said placing a hand on hers. "You saw someone?"

"No, not necessarily someone," Nancy said looking at the girl.

Jonathan and Queenie looked at her confused.

"I'm sorry," Nancy said suddenly. "I-I shouldn't have come here today. I'm... I'm so sorry."

Nancy got up to leave but Jonathan spoke stopping her. "What'd he look like?"

Nancy stopped turning back around to them. "What?"

"This man you saw in the woods," Jonathan said tears at the back of his throat. Queenie put a comforting hand on his leg. "What'd he look like?"

"I don't... I don't know," Nancy stammered. "It was almost like he... he didn't have-"

"Didn't have a face?" Jonathan interrupted.

"How did you know that?" Nancy asked.

Jonathan stood up instantly taking Queenie's hand. "Come on."

"Where are we going?" Nancy asked chasing after the two.

"To enhance the photo," Jonathan replied leading the two girls to his car. On the ride, Jonathan explained how his mom had told him about a man with no face coming out of their wall. They arrived at the high school in record time. Jonathan led the girls to the dark room beginning the process to enhance the photo.

"And you're?" Nancy asked.

"Brightening. Enlarging." Jonathan explained not straying from his work.

"Does your mom say anything else?" Nancy asked. "Like, um, where it might have gone to or..."

"No," Jonathan shook his head. "Just that it came out of the wall."

"And... we're sure this isn't just a case of folie-a-deux?" Queenie asked fear edging into her voice.

"Queenie, when do Nancy and my mom hang out enough to share a delusion," Jonathan snapped.

Queenie flinched. "Okay, you're right. I'm just really terrified. How... how could... how could something like that take Barb and Will!? Some sort of nighttime monster!?" Queenie fell into more sobs turning from the two.

Jonathan turned her around giving her a side hug as he dropped the photo paper into the solution. Nancy wrapped her arm around Queenie too.

"How long does this take?" Nancy asked.

"Not long," Jonathan replied.

"Have you been... doing this a while?" Nancy asked helping Queenie to dry her tears.

"What?" Jonathan asked.

"Photography?" Nancy clarified.

"Yeah," Jonathan replied smiling to himself.

Queenie groaned in frustration. "I don't know what's worse. The fact that there's quite possibly some scary monster running around or the fact that you two are having just about the most awkward conversation ever."

Jonathan rolled his eyes. Queenie knowing Nancy couldn't see her motioned for him to talk to her. Queenie stepped out from between the two pretending to mess with her polaroid.

"I guess I'd rather observe people than, you know..." Jonathan said looking at Nancy who had moved closer.

"Talk to them," Nancy finished smiling.

"I know," Jonathan whispered. "It's weird."

"No!" Nancy lied shaking her head.

"No," Jonathan stammered. "It is! It's just sometimes... people don't really say what they're really thinking. But you capture the right moment..."

Making sure her flash was off Queenie took a picture of the two in the red light of the dark room. She smiled thinking to herself. Speaking of capturing the right moment.

"It says more," Jonathan finished.

"What was I saying?" Nancy asked.

"What?" Jonathan asked taken back.

"When you took my picture," Nancy clarified.

"I shouldn't have taken that," Jonathan said. "I'm uh... I'm sorry. It's just-"

Nancy turned looking into the solution rather than at Jonathan. Queenie came over looking over Jonathan's other shoulder. She peered in seeing the horrifying monster.

"That's it," Nancy said. "That's what I saw."

Jonathan gasped. "My mom... I thought she was crazy 'cause she said that's not Will's body. That he's alive."

"If Will's alive, there's a good chance that Barb is too," Queenie said. "Come on, you two. Let's go get my mom's sawed-off and shoot us a monster."

6. Chapter 5: The Flea and the Acrobat

Jonathan took Nancy and Queenie home. "Hey, after the funeral tomorrow." He called. "That's when we'll meet." The girls nodded heading to their respective homes for the night.

Romeo Calabrese stood up as Queenie walked in. "Que, Joyce told me about this monster in the wall..."

"Dad, what Joyce told you is true," Queenie said cutting him off. "Jonathan got a picture of it the night Barb went missing. We think it took Barb... and Will."

Romeo stood up taking his little girl in his arms. "This is much more than just kidnappers."

Queenie nodded into his chest. "This is a monster, and we're going to kill it. We're going to save Will and Barb and kill that thing. Where's mom's sawed-off shotgun?"

Romeo nodded leading her to the gun case. He opened it up pulling out her mother's gun. He handed her a case of bullets. "You remember how to shoot it?"

Queenie nodded taking the gun in her hands. Last time, she had used it. She was in captivity. Her mother had just been shot in the back of the head. Queenie shivered at the thought, but put the gun back up for now.

The next morning the Calabrese's got ready for Will's funeral, both knowing full well that it wasn't Will that they were burying. Queenie looked down at her dress. It was pretty, but it was a lie. She grabbed her mom's sawed-off and the bullets before climbing into the truck with her dad. They drove down to the cemetery.

Queenie gave Jonathan a small wave before settling to stand by Nancy. After the ceremony, Queenie and Romeo made their way up to the Byerses. Queenie hugged Joyce whispering in her ear. "We know that Will's alive. We won't stop looking for him." Joyce nodded in thanks kissing the girl's hand.

Queenie turned to Jonathan hugging him as well whispering. "I've got the sawed-off. Let's smite that son of a bitch."

Jonathan nodded to her as his mother had.

Finally, the man beside them turned to Queenie. "I don't believe we've met," He said. "I'm Lonnie, Jonathan and Will's dad."

Queenie smiled shaking his hand. "Nice to meet you. I'm Queenie. I'm sorry it had to be under such unfortunate conditions. I'm sorry for your loss. Will is... was such an amazing kid."

"Thank you for coming," Lonnie said before looking to her father.

"I'm her father, Romeo Calabrese," he said shaking Lonnie's hand. "I'm sorry for your loss. We loved Will very very much."

Lonnie looked at Romeo suspiciously before nodding and moving on.

Once the funeral was over, Nancy, Jonathan, and Queenie sat mapping out where the monster had been. "This is where we know it's been for sure, right?"

Queenie and Nancy leaned over looking at it. Queenie cradled her mom's sawed-off in her arms. "So that's..."

"Steve's house," Jonathan said nodding. "And that's the woods where they found Will's bike and that's my house."

"They're all so close," Nancy said leaning closer to the map.

"Yeah," Jonathan said. "Exactly."

"So this creature must have a marked territory," Queenie theorized.

"You want to go out there?" Nancy said looking at Queenie and Jonathan.

Jonathan nodded vigorously.

"Nan," Queenie said. "We plan to go out there whether you do or you don't, so it's really just a question of do you want to come with us?"

"I will, but what are we going to do if we see it," Nancy asked.

"We kill it," Jonathan replied.

Queenie lifted up the sawed-off she held. "I've seen this thing take down a 6'3" 240 pound man. It can take down this monster."

"But don't you think we should have more than one weapon?" Nancy asked.

Jonathan nodded getting up and going to Lonnie's car. He picked the lock of the glovebox.

"What are you doing?" Nancy asked.

"Just give me a second," Jonathan said.

He opened it grabbing a revolver and checking for bullets. When he didn't see any he dug further in the glovebox.

"Are you serious?" Nancy exclaimed looking around worriedly.

"What? You want to find this thing and Queenie have her back turned? Take another picture? Yell at it?" Jonathan snapped.

"This is a terrible idea," Nancy said.

"Oh please, Nancy Wheeler, please enlighten us on the oh so much better idea you have?" Queenie snapped.

"Queenie," she turned to her angry. "What would your dad think?"

"My dad knows," Queenie said. "I don't keep secrets from him, not anymore."

"Well," Nancy turned to Jonathan. "We could tell your mom."

"She's been through enough," Jonathan said.

"She deserves to know," Nancy argued.

"Yeah, and I'll tell her... when this thing is dead." Jonathan said.

Nancy bit her lip. Queenie walked back over to her dad. They all went home to change clothes. Queenie stepped out on their porch putting her mom's sawed off out of sight and sat down her head in her hands. She didn't know what else to do. She knew fighting a monster was dumb and dangerous, but Barb and Will were in danger. She cared about these two people more than herself most days, and to see them gone would kill her. Queenie felt the tears fill her eyes again but she blinked them back. This is not the time to cry. She looked up to see Nancy and Steve in the Wheeler's carport.

Curiosity overtook her, and, grabbing her mom's sawed off, she made her way over to the Wheeler residence. Not noticing, Queenie almost ran into Steve as he was leaving the Wheeler's.

"Whoa," his eyes shifted to the sawed-off. "What is with you girls and grabbing weapons today?"

Queenie looked up at him. "It was my mom's. I was going to teach Nancy to shoot it... She asked... With Barb gone... she's a little freaked out, ya know?"

Steve nodded grimly. "She seems a little out of it."

"Yeah," Queenie looked up at him. "I think we all are."

Steve nodded. Queenie peered up at him before moving his face forcefully.

"Hey, what's this?" She asked pointing to the remnants of a bruise on his cheek.

"Oh," Steve laughed nervously. "From the party, you know?"

Queenie nodded. "You know, Steve... I know we don't really get along... But if you're ever in trouble... or you need a place to crash while you're drunk... My dad and I's door is always open. You just knock, and I'll probably be up. I'll come downstairs and I'll look out the window. I'll complain like " Oh god what is Harrington doing here?" But ultimately, I'll let you in."

Steve laughed. "Thanks, Queenie. But why?"

Queenie shrugged. "We're almost friends, and I can tell you care about Nancy a lot. She needs someone that cares an awful lot."

Steve nodded before grinning and holding out his hand. "Almost friends."

Queenie smiled taking it. "Almost friends."

Queenie continued on to the Wheeler's looking at Nancy. She was busy practicing her swings. "Hey!"

Nancy looked over to see Queenie with the sawed-off at her side.

"You ready to go, Wheeler?" Queenie asked.

Nancy nodded and they headed off to meet with Jonathan. They walked up seeing Jonathan miss a shot.

"You're supposed to hit the cans, right?" Nancy called teasingly.

Jonathan smiled. "No, actually, you see the spaces in between the cans? I'm aiming for those."

"Ah," Nancy said setting down her stuff.

"You ever shot a gun before?" Jonathan asked Nancy.

Nancy scoffed. "Have you met my parents?"

They all shared a small laugh. Queenie looked down at her mom's sawed-off shotgun remembering how she taught Dom and her. "With Loreta, guns were for protection. I guess being a US marshall made her paranoid, rightfully so considering she got shot in the back of the head. She taught my brother and I too shoot pretty young. It's a strange way that I keep connected to her, but she wanted me to protect myself from those that would try to hurt me." Nancy and Jonathan looked at her before nodding.

"I haven't shot one since I was ten," Jonathan said. "My dad took me hunting on my birthday. He made me kill a rabbit."

"A rabbit?" Nancy asked.

"Yeah," Jonathan said. "I guess he thought it would make me into more of a man or something. I cried for a week."

"Jesus," Nancy said.

Jonathan looked offended. "What? I'm a fan of Thumper!"

Queenie laughed as Nancy corrected him. "I meant your dad."

"Yeah," Jonathan smiled. "I guess he and my mother loved each other at some point, but..." He cocked the gun. "...I wasn't around for that part."

Nancy reached her hand out for the gun.

"Uh... yeah," Jonathan said. He opened his mouth to say more but Queenie interrupted him.

"Maybe I should handle the shooting lesson," Queenie said smiling at her friend. "Okay, first, relax. You don't want to shoot with a shaky hand. Keep your eyes open and on the target. You want to line up with this right here." Queenie pointed before moving Nancy's hand and the gun a little bit. "And as my mom used to say, don't be cool. Don't pull a James Bond and shoot one handed or sideways or not looking at your target. Give yourself all the odds."

Nancy nodded smiling before saying. "I don't think my parents ever loved each other."

"They must have married for some reason," Jonathan said.

"My mom was young. My dad was older, but he had a cushy job, money, came from a good family. So they bought a nice house at the end of the cul-de-sac... and started their nuclear family." She said bitterly.

"Screw that," Jonathan said.

"Yeah, " Nancy nodded. "Screw that." She shot, ignoring Queenie's rules, and hitting the can off the stump.

"What about you?" Jonathan asked turning to Queenie.

"Oh," She looked surprised before beginning to load the sawed-off. "My parents loved each other. They've always loved each other. They were immigrants... from Italy... escaping the war... in tiny homes... poverty ridden... too many mouths to feed. They met because there was this part of the town... specifically for Italians... the locals called it Dago town." Queenie cocked the gun. "My parents fell in love because they couldn't really love anyone else. So they started their little family, and from then on they couldn't keep to themselves, investigating corruption, bringing down powerful people. And so," Queenie aimed at the top of the stump which had held the can Nancy just shot off. "The family grew smaller." She shot blasting off a chunk of the tree trunk. They looked at each other proudly. This plan just might work.

The three of them walked through the woods they were walking in silence until Nancy decided to speak up. "You know, you never told me what I was saying."

"What?" Jonathan asked looking at her confused.

"Yesterday," Nancy continued. "You said I was saying something and that's why you took my picture."

"Oh, uh... I don't know," Jonathan said.

Queenie rolled her eyes, ignoring the two as she took pictures of the woods surrounding them. Maybe this creature shows up better on film. She had a pile of pictures that showed absolutely nothing. Queenie bent down noticing something on the ground. It looked like a piece of a table cloth or clothing or something. Queenie took a picture of it in its original location before pocketing it and turning back to Nancy and Jonathan.

"That is such bullshit," Nancy snapped.

"What?" Jonathan stammered.

"I'm not trying to be someone else," She snapped turning to him. Queenie snapped a photo of them. "Just because I'm dating Steve, and you don't like him-"

"You know what? Forget it," Jonathan snapped walking off. Oh no. "I just thought it was a good picture."

"He's actually a good guy," Nancy protested.

"Hey, Nancy!" Queenie snapped stepping in for her friend. "Did you ever think for five seconds that maybe the picture had nothing to do with Steve Harrington!?"

Nancy looked at her speechless.

"Sometimes," Queenie hissed. "People just take pictures. Sometimes, we feel we have no alternative! Sometimes, we just like to take pictures, like you like to kiss Steve and go out and be rebellious. Because for once in your life, you don't feel like the girl next door you were always destined to be. You do these things because you feel like maybe you won't end up exactly like your mother, but news flash, your mother did these things too. So no matter how hard you try. You're going to marry some tool from high school. You're going to a perfect, little housewife. And you're going to raise your own nuclear family!" Queenie stomped away cursing in Italian.

"Well, you know what Queenie Calabrese," Nancy snapped. "You're just what everyone says you are. You're a queer little freak that craves attention!"

"Oh! I crave attention, Nancy!" Queenie turned on her staring her down. "Have you looked in the mirror lately!?"

"Yeah, well, at least, I don't defend guys that take pictures of people without their permission," Nancy snapped.

"At least, I don't act like a guy that breaks other people's property on purpose is a good person," Queenie snapped.

"With the camera," Nancy sighed. "He's not like that at all." Queenie scoffed mumbling in Italian and walking off, but Jonathan looked at her to elaborate. "He was just being protective."

"Yeah," Jonathan scoffed. "That's one word for it."

"Oh," Nancy snapped. "I guess what you did is okay?"

"No!" Jonathan protested. "I... I never said that!"

"He had every right to be pissed-" Nancy continued.

"Okay, all right," Jonathan turned on her again. "Does that mean I have to like him?"

"No," Nancy said, matter-of-factly.

"Listen," Jonathan said. "Don't take it so personally okay? I don't like most people. He's in the vast majority."

"You know," Nancy said. "I was actually starting to think that you were okay."

"Yeah?" Jonathan yelled.

"Yeah," Nancy said. "Yeah I was thinking, "Jonathan Byers, maybe he's not the pretentious creepy everyone says he is"."

"Well, I was just starting to think you were okay," Jonathan said advancing on her. "I was thinking, "Nancy Wheeler, she's not just another suburban girl who thinks she's rebelling by doing exactly what every other suburban girl does... until that phase passes and they marry some boring one-time jock who now works sales, and they live out a perfectly boring little life at the end of the cul-de-sac. Exactly like their parents, who they thought were so depressing, but now, hey, they get it"."

They followed after where Queenie had disappeared now all three boiling with anger. Queenie refused to speak to either of them only mumbling to herself in Italian to pass the time. Night fell and they still weren't speaking to each other. Nancy stopped suddenly.

"What, are you tired?" Jonathan snapped turning back to her and grabbing Queenie's arm to stop her.

"Shut up," Nancy said.

"What?" Jonathan asked.

"I heard something," Nancy said looking around for the source.

"This way," Queenie said as they heard another whimper. Queenie led them through the trees to a mutilated deer.

"Oh god," Nancy said bending down beside it. "It's been hit by a car."

Queenie flashed back to the first time they arrived in Hawkins. The deer that ran out in front of their truck. They had almost hit it. Queenie took a picture of it. Jonathan and Nancy shot her a look, but she ignored them.

"We can't just leave it," Nancy said looking back at the two. They all just looked at each other. Nancy looked down at the pistol.

"I'll do it," said Queenie stepping forward. "Just back up this thing's got a lot of ricochet."

She stepped up aiming the gun at the deer's head. "I'm sorry, little buddy. Thank you for the good life you've lived." She fired the gun killing it instantly. Something instantly dragged the deer carcass away. They jumped back in fear.

"What was that?" Nancy whispered.

"What were looking for," Queenie said charging into the darkness.

"Que! No, it's too dangerous!" Jonathan yelled but Queenie was too determined to listen to his demands right now.

"Where the fuck are you?" Queenie mumbled to herself.

Queenie hears a scream and Jonathan scream "NANCY!" She runs towards finding Jonathan staring at the bat on the ground. They both began to call for Nancy searching the ground around for any sign of her.

7. Chapter 6: The Monster

Queenie bent down beside the tree near Nancy's bat. She reached out feeling a membrane like thing that you could pass through. "Jonathan! I found something!" She yelled.

Jonathan ran over bending beside Queenie. "What is it?"

"I'm not sure, but maybe Nancy went through," Queenie said reaching into her pack she pulled out a lasso.

"Why do you have that?" Jonathan asked.

"It was the only rope I could find," Queenie said. "I used to do Rodeos back in Texas." Queenie put the lasso around her waist tightly. "If I tug twice you pull us back out." She handed him the sawed-off. "Give me the pistol. It's smaller and easier to fit through this hole." Jonathan nodded handing her the pistol. Queenie bent down climbing through the membrane thing getting covered in slime. When Queenie stepped through, Nancy was hiding behind a nearby tree as the monster stalked her. Queenie lifted her camera, flash on, and began taking pictures to distract the monster while screaming. "Over here, ya big ugly brute!" The monster turned to her, and Queenie changed from her camera to the pistol. It only seemed to slow the monster down, but that's all they needed. "Nan, get over here! We'll get ya to safety!"

Nancy ran over to Queenie. Queenie hugged the girl tightly then pulled twice on the lasso. Jonathan pulled both girls back through the tree holding them both as they sobbed.

"I got you," Jonathan breathed.

"Jon," Queenie mumbled. "The bullets only slowed it down."

Jonathan watched as the portal closed before his eyes. They hurried back to Nancy and Queenie's street. Queenie waved goodbye to the two as she headed up to her house. Surprisingly, she wasn't as freaked out as the other two. Those months in captivity really changed her. She went upstairs to shower then sat by her window sill

looking at the photos she had taken that night including the ones of the monster. The cloth, of course. She had forgotten about the cloth and ran to her dirty clothes to see if it was still there. It was. Queenie laid it out with the pictures then went downstairs to make some tea. Out of the corner of her eye there was movement, so Queenie went to see what it was. After a bit, she realized it was light from the outside, so Queenie peaked out to see who it was. It was Steve Harrington's car.

Queenie moved her curtain so she could better see what was going on. When she saw Steve storming back to his car, she remembered Jonathan. Flying to her front door, she called out to him. "Steve! It's not what you think!"

"Oh? Really!?" Steve yelled. "Do enlighten me, Queenie!? What is it!? Because it looks like my girlfriend, who has been acting weird, has another guy in her room!"

"Okay, yes, that's true," Queenie said biting her lip. "But it's not because of what you think."

"Then why!?" Steve shouted stepping closer to Queenie. They were in the middle of the road now.

"We went searching for Barb," Queenie sighed. "And did Nancy tell you about the guy with no face?"

"Yeah, of course," Steve said.

Queenie bit her lip. "We kinda came face to face with him, and Nan is really freaked out."

"Why aren't you freaked out?" Steve asked.

"Nothing really freaks me out anymore," Queenie mumbled.

"Why is that?" Steve asked.

Queenie glared up at him. "I thought we were almost friends, Steve, not actually friends."

Steve rolled his eyes scoffing. "Whatever." He stormed back to his car

shooting back. "Next time you rush outside! Remember your shoes! And your pants!"

"I am wearing pants, Harrington! They're shorts! And this hoodie is really long!" Queenie yelled at the car speeding off.

Queenie rolled her eyes turning and marching back into her house, mumbling about that jerk, Steve in Italian.

Queenie grabbed her cup of tea and went back upstairs to look over the photos she took. She spent all night pouring over the pictures, trying to find anything useful. She looked at the piece of cloth. She picked it up and held it. She looked out over all the pictures seeing the pictures from her first day. She smiled. Everything was so carefree back then. Looking at each person, who had become her friend. She looked down at the cloth then at the pictures again. Her eyes widening in realization, she changed clothes and ran out to the Wheeler's.

Queenie burst through the door of Nancy's room seeing Jonathan and Nancy sitting on Nancy's bed close to each other. "Guys! I found this in the woods." She produced the cloth for them. "It's Barb's. I have a picture of her wearing it from the day we first met, and the night of the party she was wearing it."

Nancy took the piece of cloth from her. "Do you think we could use it to find Barb?"

"I think K-9 units can find just about anyone with a piece of clothing," Queenie said.

"We have to find that place again," Nancy said.

"You want to go back out there?" Jonathan asked looking at Nancy seriously.

"Maybe we don't have to," Nancy said taking a deep breath. "When I saw it, it was feeding on that deer. Meaning it's... it's a predator, right?"

"Right," Jonathan said.

"And it seems to hunt at night like a... a lion or a coyote," Nancy said pointing to them in her book.

"Wait," Queenie said turning the pages in the book. "The deer was already injured, right?"

"Yeah," Jonathan said nodding.

"And Barb," Queenie continued. "That night she had cut herself. She was gushing blood."

Nancy nodded.

Queenie smiled seeing the predator she was looking for. "Maybe it hunts more like a shark," she pointed to the animal. "They smell blood of an injured prey, and then swarm to it."

Nancy nodded agreeing. "That's what I was thinking."

"So you're saying it can detect blood?" Jonathan asked looking at the two girls.

"It's just a theory," Nancy whispered.

"The best one we've got, Nan." Queenie said.

"We could test it," Jonathan said. "But if it works..."

"We better be ready to fight," Queenie finished. Suddenly the doorknob rattled, Nancy and Jonathan grabbed hands while Queenie fell back onto the palate on the floor.

Karen spoke through the door, causing all of them to sigh with relief.

When she walked away, Nancy and Jonathan noticed their hands and let go.

"Your mom doesn't knock?" Jonathan joked making the girls smile.

"She sure knows how to give heart attacks though," said Queenie untangling herself from all the blankets and pillows. They laughed.

Once Nancy and Jonathan got dressed and Jonathan snuck back out,

they went to the hardware store to stock up on supplies. They started grabbing nails, ammunition, bear traps, and anything else they thought was useful.

The three teenagers began unpacking everything onto the counter as the guy behind it gave them an exasperated look. "What you kids doing with all this?"

They shared a look. "Monster hunting," Nancy said.

The guys scoffed rolling his eyes before ringing them up.

As they took everything out to Jonathan's car he asked laughing slightly. "Monster hunting?"

"You know last week I was shopping for a new top I thought Steve would like. It took us all weekend, it seemed like life or death." Nancy said laughing.

"It was absolute death for me," Queenie added snickering. "So much shopping and barely anything to show for it!?"

Jonathan and Nancy laughed at their overdramatic friend. Nancy smiled at Queenie taking her hand and squeezing it before continuing. "And now..."

"You're shopping for bear traps with Jonathan Byers," Jonathan finished. "What's the weirdest part? Me or the bear trap?"

Nancy looked at him. "You. It's definitely you."

Queenie smirked stepping back and taking their picture.

Suddenly a car honked at them causing all three to turn to them. "Hey, Nance, can't wait to see your movie."

"What was that?" Jonathan asked.

"I don't know," Nancy mumbled.

Queenie thought back to her argument with Steve last night. "I think I do," she growled. "And he's fucking dead." She rushed to Jonathan's

driver side. "Jon. Keys." Jonathan tossed Queenie his keys as the other two scrambled to get in the car.

Queenie drove towards the theater hoping to find Steve nearby, so she could beat the shit out of him.

"Oh my God," Nancy mumbled as they pulled up next to the theater. Queenie parked Jonathan's car and the three of them got out staring up at the cinema. ALL THE RIGHT MOVES STARRING NANCY THE SLUT WHEELER was painted there for the entire town to see.

Queenie glared at it her eyes searching for the idiots that did this. Hearing a shout from a nearby alley, Queenie stalked toward it. Seeing Steve she shouted at him in Italian her anger getting the best of her. "You fucking asshole, you don't deserve to breathe the same air as Nancy if this is how you treat her." Queenie now stood face to face with Steve despite the height difference Steve was intimidated.

"Looks like Queerie went off," Tommy said snickering.

"I told you," she growled in English ignoring Tommy's remark. "I told you it wasn't like that!"

"Then why didn't she come to me!?" Steve exclaimed, his voice cracking with unshed tears.

"Aww, hey there Princess," Carol said in a mocking tone drawing Steve and Queenie out of their staring contest.

Queenie turned to see Nancy making her way to them anger and tears in her eyes.

"Uh oh, she looks upset," Tommy said earning a glare from Queenie.

Nancy glared at him. Steve looked back clearly upset. With a loud smack, Nancy slapped him. The crowd of idiots yelled "Oh" at this.

"What is wrong with you!?" Nancy snapped.

"What's wrong with me? What's wrong with you? I was worried about you." Steve said.

Queenie bit her lip. Steve still cares about Nancy even if he has total douchey ways of showing it. He cares about her.

"I can't believe I was worried about you," Steve scoffed.

"What are you talking about?" Nancy looked at him confused.

"I wouldn't lie if I were you," Carol said smirking. "You wouldn't want to be known as the lying slut now?"

"It's not a lie, cagna," Queenie spat.

Tommy glanced at her before focusing on Jonathan who was approaching. "Speak of the devil." Tommy jumped down. "Hi."

Nancy glanced back. "You came by last night."

"Ding, ding, ding," Carol said. "Does she get a prize?"

"Look, I don't know what you think you saw-" Nancy began.

"Nan, give it a rest," Queenie said. "I explained it to you last night Steve. If you think Nancy would do that to you, you're a lot more stupid than I thought. Nancy really fucking cares about you; she always has! And you know what, you really fucking care about her! For half a second, I thought this would be okay, but you pulled this shit and now I don't even want to call you my almost friend." Queenie ignored the confused look she got from Jonathan and Nancy. "I see it, Steve, the love you have for Nancy. I see it because I've felt it before. I felt it for someone in this very town, but- you... you let jealousy and idiotic friend choices consume you."

"Don't act like a saint, Calabrese," Steve growled his voice and anger rising. "Don't pretend you know what I'm feeling! You said that you had an encounter with someone you think killed Will and kidnapped Barb, but they don't even have a face!? You didn't need anyone to comfort you afterwards."

"Do you want to know why Steven!?" Queenie yelled fire in her eyes. "Because I've been through a lot of shit. Including watching my mother get shot in the back of the head. Her brains covered my entire body! That's why I'm unaffected by these things! That's... that's..."

Queenie slumped in defeat.

The entire group was silent staring at the girl in shock. Jonathan grabbed both girls' and led them away. This gesture made Steve's anger return. "You know what Byers? I'm actually kind of impressed. I always took you for a queer but I guess you're just a little screw up like your father." Steve shoved Jonathan. "Oh yeah. Yeah yeah yeah. Yeah, that house is full of screw ups." Shove. "You know, I guess I shouldn't be surprised there's a bunch of screw ups in your family-"

"Jonathan leave it," Nancy said.

Queenie stepped out of the way.

"I mean your mom," Steve snickered gesturing to Jonathan. "I'm not even surprised what happened to your brother. I'm sorry I have to be the one to tell you, but the Byers." Shove. Nancy is pleading with Steve to shut up. "Their entire family is a disgrace to the entire-"

Jonathan turned around swinging.

Queenie took in a sharp breath. Steve tackled Jonathan to the ground and the two began fighting. Nancy was still protesting for them to stop.

The sounds were getting to Queenie though. She started to tune out everything but the two masses fighting in front of her. The sickening cracks of bones. With each swing, Queenie could see less and less of what was around her. She couldn't tell who was fighting anymore. She saw a lighter haired mass jump on top of the darker haired mass. Queenie threw herself between the two blocking the darker haired one with her own body.

"Please!" She cried tears staining her cheeks. "Please don't hurt Dom! Please don't hurt him! Don't hurt Dom! I-I can't live without him! Dom..."

Queenie didn't notice the right hook to her jaw. She didn't notice when the sirens went off making people scatter. She didn't notice when an officer helped her up off the ground walking her towards the local paper's office.

"Principessa!" Someone called. "Principessa, look at me. Only at me." Someone moved her face to look into concerned grey eyes. "Principessa, it's me. It's Papá. I'm here. Dom isn't hurting anymore." Queenie's eyes squinted against the light. She was finally able to make out who was in front of her. It was her dad.

Queenie looked at him scared then collapsed into tears.

8. Chapter 7: The Bathtub

Romeo placed an ice pack on the bruise on Queenie's cheek. Queenie looked up into her dad's eyes. "Where's Nancy? Where's Jon?"

Romeo bit his lip. "Principessa, I don't think you should go see them after that."

"Dad!" Queenie yelled scaring the man slightly. "I have to see them! They'll fight that monster alone! I can't let them do that."

Romeo nodded grimly before driving them to the police station.

"TAKE THEM OFF!" Joyce yelled as they stepped inside the station.

"You heard her take 'em off," Hopper added.

"Why is Jon in handcuffs?" Queenie asked making everyone look at her before Powell, one of the other officers, interrupted.

"Chief, I get everyone's emotional here, but there's something you need to see," he said. He led Hopper out to Jonathan's car trunk while Nancy crossed the way to Queenie.

"Hey," Nancy smiled slightly trying to hide her worry. "You okay?"

Queenie nodded. "What happened? I kinda..."

"You threw yourself on top of Steve between Jonathan and him. But..." Nancy bit her lip. "You were shouting at him to not hurt Dom."

Queenie's face paled. "Are... Did I do anything else?"

Nancy shook her head. "You just kept saying how you couldn't live without "Dom"." Nancy hesitated. "Do... Who is Dom?"

"Was," Queenie corrected. "Dom was my brother. He still is, but... he's dead. He was murdered... in front of me... We were... we were kidnapped."

Nancy held back tears but pulled the girl into a hug. Queenie

returned the hug letting a few tears fall down her face.

Hopper walked back in carrying the box of monster hunting supplies. He slammed it down. The three teens sat arms crossed in front of Hopper. The two parents stood beside them investigating the box that Hopper had found.

"What is this stuff?" Joyce asked.

"Why don't you ask your son?" Hopper said. "We found it in his car."

"What?" Joyce asked bewildered.

"Why were you going through my car?" Jonathan snapped leaning forward.

"Is that really the question you should be asking right now!?" Hopper sneered. "I wanna see you in my office."

"No," Romeo stated glaring at the Chief of Police. "You have no right to use any of this against him. You had no right to even glance in his car." Romeo pushed the man away from Jonathan. "His charges have nothing to do with his car. You are the ones that broke the law."

"It is my job to keep the people of this town safe," Hopper growled.

"You're doing a hell of a job at it," Queenie grumbled as her father continued speaking. "Not at the expense of the rights of the people in your town. I will not allow you to take this boy to your office."

"You're not a lawyer," Hopper hissed. "You are a writer. Stay where you belong."

"You'll find," Romeo said, narrowing his eyes at the man. "That I won't."

"You wouldn't believe us anyways," Jonathan said.

"Why don't you try me?" Hopper whispered.

The group of people including Romeo made their way to Hopper's office as the three teenagers explained what they had learned of the

monster with no face. "So you're saying blood draws this thing?"

"We don't know," Jonathan admitted.

"It's just a theory," Nancy added.

"One I intend to try with or without your support," Queenie mumbled not meeting anyone's eyes.

Joyce took Jonathan out to talk to him. Romeo gave Queenie a hug looking at Nancy. "Do you want us to take you home if Hopper doesn't let him go?"

Nancy bit her lip then nodded her head. "Thank you, Mr. Calabrese. I'm sorry for basically everything I've gotten your daughter involved in."

Romeo smiled. "It's okay, Nancy. She would have gotten into this trouble with or without you. She has her mother and I's blood running through her veins. And please Nancy call me Romeo."

Nancy bit her lip, trying to hold in a laugh.

Romeo smiled seeing the action. "Yes, I know. Thanks to William Shakespeare no one can say my name without chuckling, but I swear it has nothing to do with that."

"Oh, of course, Romeo," Nancy said before the small group of people let out a laugh.

Queenie looked down at her shaky hands. "I'm gonna go get some fresh air. If you need me, I'll just be outside."

Nancy and Romeo nodded in understanding. Queenie stepped out of the police station grabbing her backpack from Jonathan's backseat. She pulled out her walkman and an old pack of cigarettes that had been Dominique's. She sat against the wall lighting a cigarette up and letting the sounds of Def Leppard's Foolin' fill her ears. She took a drag of the cigarette relishing in the comfort the foul tasting thing gave her. Queenie laid her head back closing her eyes. What the fuck has her life become?

Someone kicked Queenie's shoes getting her attention. She looked up to be met with the beaten face of Steve. Queenie slipped her headphones off. "What the fuck are you doing here?"

"I should've listened to you," Steve said ignoring her question. "I did have shit friends. The one person that hates me is the only one that acts like a real friend to me." Queenie looked up at him to elaborate. He sighed sitting beside her. "Tommy did all the spray paint, but I didn't stop him. I'm a total asshole." He laid his head back on the wall.

Queenie snickered. "Yeah, you are." Queenie held out the pack. "Want a cig?"

Steve shrugged. He took the cigarette letting her light it for him. "Queenie, I'm sorry for being an asshole to you... and Nance... and Jonathan."

Queenie shrugged. "Don't worry about it. It's what is expected of you."

"Yeah, but that doesn't make it right," Steve said. "What I'm trying to say is... Do you think we could start over and be actual friends this time?"

Queenie shrugged. "I don't know," she looked down kicking a pebble near her toe. "Are you going to be less of an asshole?" Queenie smiled mischievously at the boy. "And do you like Def Leppard?"

Steve smiled widely. "Oh yeah. Pyromania is amazing!"

Queenie smiled holding up her headphones. Steve took them from her and listened to the album blasting through the speakers for a bit before returning the headphones to her.

Queenie took a final drag from her cigarette noticing her father standing at the door of the police station. "Look, I've gotta go back inside, but I'll see you later." She stamped the cigarette out. "Oh and apologize to Nancy. She makes you really happy, and that's the Steve I like to see."

Steve nodded in agreement before the Calabrese stepped around him.

"Oh," she turned and threw him the ice pack which he caught easily. "You need that more than I do."

Romeo met his daughter as she came inside the station. "Who was that?"

"Oh, that's just my friend, Steve," Queenie said smiling slightly at the conversation they had shared.

Romeo smiled at her. He couldn't help but think of how his daughter had spoke of Steve before. She didn't seem to like him before. Romeo wondered what had changed her mind. He hoped this new label for Steve was a smart one on her part.

"So there's a little girl that could help us that hangs out with the boys?" Queenie asked for clarification after Hopper explained to them their next plan of action.

"And there are government agents after her?" Romeo asked.

"Yeah, so we have to hurry," Hopper said ushering them out to cars.

As they pulled up on their street, they could see large black cars clearing out the Wheeler residence. "I have to go home," Nancy said.

"No, you can't," Hopper stated.

"My mom, my dad are there," Nancy protested.

"They'll be okay," Hopper lowered his binoculars.

Nancy ignored him walking towards her house. He stopped her. They argued, but Queenie wasn't paying attention she was wracking her brain for places the kids could have gone. As soon as the idea came to Queenie, she took off into the woods.

"Queenie!" Romeo yelled before stopping himself. He looked back into the car. "I think Queenie took off after them, but we should try to look for them in case she was wrong."

"I don't know where they are, but I think I know how to ask them," Jonathan said. They nodded and took off towards the Byers

residence.

Queenie jumped over a fallen log dodging the branches that threatened to scratch at her face. She remembered one conversation with the boys.

"If you're going to be a part of the party, you have to know base," Mike said.

Lucas nodded in agreement. "But you have to swear an oath that you will not divulge this information to anyone outside of the party."

Queenie gave a nervous smile. "I don't think we're talking about playing D-n-D anymore."

"Of course we aren't," Dustin replied with his lisp. "This is much deeper than that."

Will nodded. "We voted. It was unanimous."

Queenie bit her lip before nodding slowly. "I swear to never tell another living soul outside of present company."

Lucas stepped forward spitting into his hand and holding it out. Cringing slightly Queenie spit into her own hand taking his. The boys smiled widely.

Queenie was hitting herself for not thinking of it earlier. She broke through the trees, the junkyard now insight. She made her way over to the bus giving the special knock. There was a commotion behind the door before it opened to reveal Dustin, Lucas, Mike, and a girl.

"Elle, this is our other party member, Queenie," Mike introduced her to me. "Queenie this is Eleven."

"She has superpowers," Dustin added. "She's awesome."

"She flipped a van!" Lucas exclaimed.

"She's the newest party member," Mike added.

Queenie smiled at the girl. "Hey, it's nice to meet you."

Elle smiled at Queenie. "Nice to meet you."

"We have to get Elle to safety," Queenie said. "There are government agents after her, and they have a helicopter."

"We know," Mike said. "We can't think of anywhere-"

"We have to get her to my dad," Queenie interrupted. "We can help to hide her."

"But if we step out there, they'll find us," Lucas argued.

"The longer we stay here, the easier it'll be to find us," Queenie said.

"How is your dad going to help?" Dustin asked.

"My dad's not alone," Queenie explained. "We can keep her safe together."

Mike opened his mouth to argue but was interrupted by the walkie-talkie. "Mike, are you there? Mike?"

"Shh," Dustin hissed. "You guys hear that?"

"Mike, it's me, Nancy," Nancy said through the walkie-talkie. "Mike, are you there? Answer. Mike, we need you to answer."

"Is that your sister?" Lucas asked.

"This is an emergency, Mike." Nancy said more firmly. "Do you copy? Mike, do you copy?"

"Okay, this is really weird," Dustin said.

Lucas grabbed at the walkie-talkie but Mike pushed him away.

"Don't answer," he said.

"She said it was an emergency," Lucas argued.

"What if it's a trick?" Mike replied.

"It's your sister," Lucas snapped clearly annoyed.

"What if the bad people kidnapped her!?" Mike snapped panicking.

"Give it to me," Queenie said. "If it is a trick, I can always say that I didn't find you kids." Mike began to argue, but Queenie ripped the walkie-talkie out of his hand. "Hey, guys. I want to speak to my dad."

"Queenie!" Nancy exclaimed through the walkie-talkie. "Did you find the kids?"

"I want to speak to my dad. I'll only speak to my dad," she said.

A few seconds of heavy silence pass before "Principessa, it's me."

Queenie smiled down at the kids before speaking in Italian. "Dad, I've found the boys and the little girl. Her name is Elle, and she's just like the chief described her."

Romeo replied in Italian through the walkie-talkie. "Good. Is everyone okay?"

Queenie looked around the group of kids answering in Italian. "No one seems to be physically hurt, but we're running out of places to hide Elle."

"Where are you?" He asked in Italian.

Queenie bit her lip answering in Italian. "The junkyard, but the agents are closing in. I don't know how much longer we can be here."

"We're coming," Romeo replied in Italian. "Over."

Queenie looked at the kids around her. "We'll be alright. Help is on the way."

They waited around until the agents showed up scouring the junkyard. "Hide!" Queenie hissed to the kids. "They don't know I'm involved in this. I can make up some lie." The kids dived behind the seats. The door slowly crept open then they heard a two thumps. The door opened to reveal Chief Hopper.

"All right, let's go," he said breathlessly. "Let's go!"

Everyone grabbed their stuff and ran out of the bus quickly. Hopper took the four kids and teenager to the Byers residence. Romeo ran out grabbing Queenie in a hug as Nancy did the same to Mike. The Calabrese's shared a quick conversation in Italian reassuring each other that they were okay.

"Is that my dress?" Nancy asked looking at Elle. Everyone looked back to see the young girl looking overwhelmed from all the attention.

Queenie smiled walking over to the girl. She placed a reassuring arm on her shoulder. "It's okay. You look great in it."

Everyone found their way back into the Byers's house. Mike began explaining the dimension the monster lived in. "Okay, so in this example, we're the acrobat. Will and Barbara... and that monster they're this flea. And this is the Upside Down, where Will is hiding. Mr. Clarke said the only way to get there is through a rip in time and space."

"Like a wormhole or..." Queenie trailed off unsure what she wanted to say. "Or... a weird membrane in a tree in the forest."

Nancy and Jonathan shot Queenie a look.

"A gate," Dustin corrected.

"That we tracked to Hawkins Lab," Lucas said.

"With our compasses," Dustin added.

They were met with looks of confusion.

"Okay," Dustin continued. "So the gate has a really strong electromagnetic field-"

"Meaning that when near it, compasses will point towards it rather than magnetic North," Queenie said smiling at the boys.

"Is this gate underground?" Hopper asked.

"Yes," Eleven replied.

"Near a large water tank?" Hopper continued.

"Yes," Eleven said.

"Ho-how do you know all that?" Dustin asked.

"He's seen it," Mike replied simply.

"Is there anyway that you could-" Joyce said her voice cracking. "That you could reach Will? That you could talk to him in this-"

"The Upside Down," Eleven answered.

"Down," Joyce mumbled. "Yeah."

Eleven nodded.

"And my friend Barbara," Nancy asked. "Can you find her, too?"

"Please," Queenie mumbled tears springing to her eyes. "There's something I need to tell her before it's too late."

Eleven nodded. Romeo looked at his daughter with sympathy. He knew of his daughter's crush on Barb, but he didn't expect it to be to the extent of what she was showing with her words right now.

They sat around the dinner table as Elle tried to use the walkie-talkie to contact the Upside Down. The lights flickered off but nothing was heard from the walkie-talkie. "I'm sorry," Elle whispered. "I can't find them." Queenie let out a choked sob. She should've told Barbara how she felt before. Elle stepped into the bathroom to calm herself down.

"Whenever she uses her powers, she gets weak," Mike explained.

"The more energy she uses, the more tired she gets," Dustin added.

"Like, she flipped the van earlier," Lucas said.

"It was awesome," Dustin added.

Queenie smiled at the boys antics.

"But she's drained," Mike said.

"Like a bad battery," Dustin added.

"Well, h-h-how do we make her better?" Joyce asked.

"We don't," Mike said. "We just have to wait and try again."

"Nonna, used to say the only way to refuel a person is to feed them more," Queenie said.

Romeo smiled. "I could make her some hot chocolate."

Queenie smiled nodding in agreement. "Dad's italian hot chocolate is to die for. It always makes me feel better."

"The bath," Elle interrupted.

Everyone turned to her. "What?" Joyce asked.

"I can find them," Elle said, holding back tears. "In the bath."

"Bath? What kind of bath?" Romeo asked.

"Salty..." Elle mumbled.

"Like a sensory deprivation tank?" Queenie asked. "I remember reading about those, but I don't remember the ratios."

"I know someone who will," Dustin said rushing to the phone.

As Dustin called Mr. Clarke, Queenie stepped in the bathroom finally seeing the bruise on her face. It looked really bad. She didn't realize how bad it was until now.

Jonathan noticed her looking at it and stopped leaning in. "Hey, I'm really sorry about that. I was... blinded by anger."

"Don't worry about it Jon," Queenie said smiling at her friend. "I had a flashback because of the fight. I wasn't in my right head."

"Yeah, sorry about that Que," Jonathan said looking down guiltily.

"Don't worry about it," Queenie said. "Come on." She grabbed his hand. "We should get back to the others." She led him to the others

where Dustin had finished with the phone call.

"How much is lots?" Hopper asked.

Dustin looked down at his paper. "1500 pounds of it."

"Well, where are we gonna get that much salt?" Nancy asked.

They all drove down to the school. Romeo, Jonathan, and Jim grabbing bag after bag of de-icing salt. The kids helped set up the pool in the gym. Joyce spent her time talking to Elle. Queenie and Nancy sat to one corner talking.

"Hey, Nan," Queenie began biting her lip out of nervousness. "Di- did you-"

"Did I know you had a crush on Barb?" Nance finished her question. "To be honest, Queenie, I really don't know who you have a crush on. You are so good at hiding your feelings, but you are also like so close with everyone."

Queenie smiled at her friend. "Maybe I've got a crush on all of you."

Nancy snorted with laughter causing Queenie to laugh too.

"But, seriously," Queenie said. "You don't feel any different about me."

"Queenie," Nancy said giving her a look. "Why would I care if you're a lesbian?"

"Oh, um," Queenie bit her lip. "I know it can be confusing, but I'm not a lesbian. I'm bisexual. I like everyone, guys, girls, whatever."

Nancy smiled at Queenie. "Thanks for trusting me enough to tell me."

Queenie smiled. "The boys just said something along the lines of you flirt with girls a lot better than with guys." Nancy and Queenie burst into laughter.

"So, just to make sure, who else knows?" Nancy asked. "I don't want

to out you to anyone before you tell them."

"Just my dad, the boys, Jon, and you," Queenie said. "But, like, I want to be fully out. I just... I'm scared that people won't accept me for it. You heard how Tommy used the word queer... like a slur."

Nancy stiffened at the reminder of what happened earlier that day but nodded. "Yeah, I get it. Well, I don't, but I won't tell anyone."

Queenie nodded, gratefully. She took a deep breath. "Hey, I know you probably don't want to hear about Steve right now, but it wasn't him that tagged the town. It was Tommy. Steve was still a douche because he didn't stop him, but-"

Nancy sighed. "I'm going to talk to him about it, but thanks for standing up for him." Nancy shot her a pained smile.

"Of course, Nan," Queenie smiled patting her back. "What are friends for?"

Nancy laughed hugging the girl before walking away to talk to Mike. Within a few minutes they had prepared the kiddie pool for Elle. She took everything but the dress off and put on the duct-taped goggles. She laid down in the pool as the static crackled. Then the electricity went out, plunging them into darkness.

"What's going on?" Nancy asked.

"I don't know," Mike replied.

"Is Barb okay?" Nancy asked.

Queenie sucked in a breath. No, no, it can't be. She refused to believe it.

"Is she okay?" Nancy yelled distress seeping through her voice.

"Gone," Elle mumbled over and over.

"NO!" Queenie yelled letting sobs wracked her body all over. "NO! NO. NO."

Romeo grabbed his daughter holding her while she wailed about her lost love. Queenie didn't want to believe that she was actually gone. "Hey, hey, look at me."

Queenie looked up into her father's kind eyes. "Will... Is Will okay?"

Romeo nodded. "We're going to get him. I want you to stay here with the kids, Nancy, and Jonathan. Okay? You have to keep them safe."

Queenie nodded. "I will, Papá. I will."

Romeo left with Joyce and Jim. Queenie found Nancy and Jonathan sitting out in the hall outside of the gym. She sat beside Nancy in silence.

"We have to go back to the station," Nancy said.

"What?" Jonathan asked.

"Your parents and Hopper are just walking in there like bait," Nancy stated. "That thing is still in there. And we can't just sit here and let it get them, too."

"We have to kill it," Queenie added. "For Barb. To give them a fighting chance."

9. Chapter 8: The Upside Down

Queenie bit her lip in anticipation. She knew that it was dangerous to fight the Demogorgon, but she also knew if she didn't that thing would kill her dad and Joyce and the Chief. Turning the corner, she bumped into Elle wrapped in a towel. Queenie bent down to her level.

"Elle, can you-" Queenie sighed. "Can you keep the boys safe for me?"

Elle nodded. "Leaving?"

"Yeah, we have to-" Queenie bit her lip. "We have to draw this thing away from our parents, so they can get Will out safely."

Elle looked up at Queenie with sad eyes.

Queenie reached underneath her shirt pulling out her crescent moon pendant. She unclasped and handed it to Elle. "See this." Elle nodded. "It's mine; my brother had a matching one that looked like the sun. It was so we could always be together even when we're apart." Queenie placed the pendant around Elle's neck. "Now, I'll be with you even when I'm far away."

Elle touched the pendant smiling slightly. She looked into Queenie's warm, brown eyes. "Pretty."

Queenie smiled nodding. "Very pretty."

Elle hugged the older girl which Queenie returned. "Thank you." Elle mumbled.

Queenie nodded then ran out the middle school to Jonathan's car. They hurried to the Byers's residence then began setting up their traps for the Demogorgon. Nancy made sure to load the revolver and kept the bullets in an easy access place. Queenie loaded her mom's sawed-off with extra bullets on her person. Their last thing was to spread the gasoline in an organized line throughout the house.

Taking a deep breath the three teens made their way to the middle of the traps. Jonathan handed each of them a kitchen knife.

"Remember."

"Straight into Will's room. And-" Nancy said.

"Don't step on the trap," Queenie finished.

"Wait for the yo-yo to move," Nancy continued.

"Then," Jonathan flicked the lighter on closing it again. "All right. You ready?"

"Ready," the girls said together.

"On three," Jonathan said as they held out their hands. "One."

"Two," Nancy said.

"Neither of you have to do this," Jonathan said.

"Jonathan stop talking," Nancy snapped.

"Three," Queenie interrupted and they all sliced their palms open. Nancy closed her eyes as she sliced. Jonathan winced. Queenie watched curiously. She squeezed her hand letting more blood seep out between her fingers.

Jonathan grabbed the first aid kit and began to clean Nancy's wound. Queenie watched her red fingers as they glistened in the poor lighting on the house. She looked at it curiously wondering whose blood it was this time. The image of Dominique laying dead on the floor passed through her eyes. Then the image of her mother smiling then her face exploding. Then the image of her attacker clutching his leg in pain on the ground. All of that blood was on Queenie's hand metaphorically and now physically. That blood was mixing with her own reminding Queenie of the true monster in all this, herself.

"Que," Jonathan said causing the girl to jump in fright.

Nancy held up the first aid kit. Both of their hands were bandaged now. Queenie nodded slightly letting Jonathan clean the wound and Nancy bound it tightly.

Suddenly there was a banging on the door. "Jonathan!?" Steve yelled. "Are you there, man? It's... it's Steve."

Jonathan and Nancy shared a confused look. Queenie groaned in frustration. "Steve, I applaud you on becoming a better person but now is not the best time."

"Listen, I just wanna talk!" Steve yelled before continuing to bang on the door.

"I got this guys. We're friends now," Queenie said walking over to the door yelling through it. "Harrington, is that you!? What the fuck you doing trying to give people heartattacks like that!?"

"Queenie?" Steve yelled.

"No, it's a racoon that stole Queenie's voice," Queenie replied sarcastically.

"Is Jonathan there?" He called through the door. Nancy got up to stand behind Queenie.

"Yeah, he is," Queenie said. "But now's not a really good time to talk. Maybe y'all could go out for coffee sometime and work through your issues."

"Queenie, it's important," Steve said.

Queenie rolled her eyes. "Y'all stay ready, I'll get him to leave." Queenie opened the door slipping out and closing it behind her. "Look, Steve, you need to leave. Right now really isn't a good time."

"I'm not trying to start anything, okay?" Steve said.

"I figured that much, but it's just a really bad time," Queenie replied.

"Please, Queen, I messed up... I'm trying... I'm trying to make things right," Steve said trying to get past Queenie.

"Look Steve I get i-"

"What happened to your hand?" Steve said eyeing the gauze around

her hand. "Is that blood?"

Queenie bit her lip hiding her hand behind her back. "Oh just a little accident making stew for dinner. I know how hard Ms. Byers-

"Bullshit Que," Steve said. "What the hell are you doing?" Steve shoved past her into the house. He stumbled into the house making eye contact with Nancy, Jonathan, and then all the weird traps. "Nancy? What is... What the..."

Jonathan grabbed him shoving him towards the door. Queenie side-stepped her way in the house avoiding getting hit by the full force of Steve. "You need to get out of here. Listen to me, I'm not asking you, I'm telling you, get out of here."

"What is that smell? Is that- is that gasoline?" Steve asked still trying to fight Jonathan off.

Nancy cocked the revolver pointing it at Steve. "Steve, get out!"

"Whoa, whoa," Queenie said stepping between Steve and Nancy, in line of the revolver. "Look, Nance, I don't want Steve here as much as you do, but pulling a gun on him to protect him from the danger we're willingly putting ourselves in isn't keeping him very safe."

"You're putting yourselves in danger willingly!?" Steve yelled panic evident in his voice.

"Steve, I'm literally prepared to take a bullet for you," Queenie said not breaking eye contact with Nancy. "Nan, I know you. You don't want to see Steve hurt. You care about him, a lot. So, put the gun down."

"Nancy! Queenie!" Jonathan yelled breaking their staring contest. "The lights. It's here."

"Wait, what's here?" Steve asked in a panic.

"Demogorgon. Prince of Demons. Challenge rating 26. Alignment chaotic evil." Queenie stated earning her a horrified stare from Steve. "Basically we're in deep shit if we can't kill it."

"Where is it?" Nancy asked looking around.

Jonathan grabbed the bat as Queenie cocked the sawed-off.

"I don't know. I don't see it." Jonathan said. They continued searching the house for it.

"Hello? Will someone please explain to me what the hell is going-" Steve was cut off by a large crash.

The demogorgon burst through the ceiling. Nancy began shooting at it. Jonathan grabbed her moving her further into the house. Queenie couldn't hear anything over the blood rushing in her ears. As it dropped through the ceiling Queenie fired at it. Jonathan grabbed Steve's hand pulling him from the chaos. Queenie shoved him through the door following giving one last glance to the terrifying creature chasing them.

They ran through the house avoiding the traps. Queenie still couldn't distinguish sounds outside that of her own heartbeat. They made it to Will's room; Nancy shut the door as Queenie collapsed on the bed. She took a deep breath her hearing and heart rate slowly returning to normal.

"Que, you okay?" Jonathan asked shooting his best friend a concerned look.

Queenie took a gulp of air giving him a thumbs-up. "Never better."

They all stared at the door waiting for something to happen, but suddenly all the noise around them stopped. Jonathan closed the lighter.

They opened the door cautiously. Jonathan stepped out bat at the ready. He was followed by Nancy with the revolver then Queenie with the sawed-off and finally Steve. Everything in the house seemed normal, that is to say there is no sign of the Demogorgon still being there.

Steve began muttering to himself "This is crazy." over and over again.

Queenie glared at him. "Steve Harrington, I'm gonna need you to look

at me." She lightly slapped his cheeks to get him to focus on her. "Look at me, damn it." Steve's brown eyes filled with fear found her brown ones seeing comfort in the strength they held. "Now, we're all scared shitless, but unless you keep it together we might not all make it out of this. I need you to keep it together for five seconds for me. Can you do that?"

"No, this is insane!" Steve exclaims. "What the hell are you doing!?"

"It's going to come back," Nancy yelled her anger rising. "So if you can't keep it together you need to leave now!"

Steve ran out of the house fumbling with his keys. He stopped to look back at the pulsing lights of the house, the house that contained the girl he loved and the best friend he's ever had.

Queenie sighed watching the door that Steve had just slammed. As the lights began to flicker, she cocked the shotgun preparing for another fight.

"Where is it?" Nancy asked sounding panicked.

"Come on," Jonathan said lifting the bat higher. "Come on you son of a bitch. You see it?"

"If I saw it you'd hear shots, Jon," Queenie replied gritting her teeth. "Let's go fucker."

"Where are you?" Jonathan growled. "Come on!"

The lights went out, plunging them into darkness. A second of tense silence was followed by a low growling coming from behind Queenie. She turned around letting out a shot as Nancy yelled. "Jonathan!"

The creature knocked Jonathan to the ground knocking the bat out of his hand. Queenie cocked the shotgun aiming again. "I don't know how thick this thing is. I don't want to accidentally shoot Jonathan. If the-

She was cut off by Nancy shooting at it with the revolver. "Go to Hell you son of a bitch!"

The creature stood up off of Jonathan. Queenie smiled. "Thanks, Nan." Queenie took a shot blasting of a chunk of the monster's right shoulder. The monster looked over and roared at Queenie, panicking she fumbled to cock the gun for another shot.

Nancy shot at the monster again bringing it's attention off of Queenie onto her. She emptied the barrell. She backed up in fear preparing for the blow from the monster.

It never came because out of nowhere someone swung the bat at the monster connecting with the monster's head. "Steve?" Nancy exclaimed.

Queenie smiled. "Knock 'im outta the park, Harrington!"

Steve swung again backing the monster away from Nancy and towards the bear trap. With one final swing to the stomach, Steve knocked the monster into the trap.

"He's in the trap!" Jonathan called.

"He's stuck!" Steve yelled.

"Jonathan now!" Nancy yelled.

Jonathan threw the lighter down. "Queenie!"

"Got it!" Queenie took aim at the bucket of gasoline above the bear trap. She shot it causing the bucket to explode all over the monster. They shielded their eyes as the demogorgon went up in flames.

Jonathan grabbed the fire extinguisher. "Get back!" He began spraying down the flames. Queenie covered her mouth and nose with her shirt tail hoping to keep herself from breathing in the fumes.

They started coughing waiting for the smoke to clear.

"Where'd it go?" Nancy asked.

"No," Jonathan whispered. "It has to be dead. It has to be."

"Goddammit!" Queenie yelled hitting the wall. "We almost had that

fucker!"

The other three teenagers looked at her slightly scared. Jonathan took her hand pulling her into a hug.

"Jon, what if it goes after our parents? Dad's the only family I've got left." Queenie said letting tears run down her face.

"Shhh," he kissed her head smoothing down her hair. "It's injured. They'll be alright."

The Christmas lights start lighting up again one by one. Steve stood in front of the others protectively with the bat raised. The lights began to lead away from them, so they followed it.

"Mom," Jonathan said breathlessly. "Is that you?"

"Papà," Queenie called out her voice still shaking slightly. "Ci sei anche tu?"

In the upside down, Joyce and Romeo both stopped.

"Jonathan?" Joyce called out searching the empty house for him.

Romeo smiled sadly before calling out to his own daughter. "Figlia, sono qui."

"Joyce! Romeo!" Chief Hopper called to them and they both followed.

In their own realm, the four teenagers stepped out onto the Byers's porch watching the street lamp flicker.

"Where's it going?" Nancy asked.

"I don't think that's the monster," Jonathan answered.

The four teenagers went back into the Byers's house to await any news. Queenie sat down by Steve on the dusty couch. "So, that was pretty fucking badass of you to swoop in and save the day."

Steve smiled at her. "I couldn't leave you guys to fight that thing alone."

Queenie smiled bumping his shoulder with her own. "Thanks, Harrington. I knew you weren't a complete coward." Steve snorted and rolled his eyes. Queenie laughed. Looking at the ground in front of her, her smile fell. "That thing killed Barb."

Steve swallowed looking at her surprised. "What..."

Queenie explained everything to Steve from the monster to Eleven. "And worst of all, I never got the courage to ask her out." Queenie froze realizing her words.

Steve swallowed looking at her with pity.

Queenie laughed bitterly. "That is not how I wanted to come out to you, but you were going to learn eventually. I'm bisexual. It means I like people not a specific gender but people. And I know you probably don't want to be friends with a queer like me. But I'm not going to change who I am because someone dislikes it. I'm just scared you're gonna run off and tell everyone then I'll-"

"Queenie," Steve cut her off. "I'm sorry for... for anything offensive I may have said in the past. Help me become a better ally," He gave her a smile. "I'm not going to tell anyone about it. I'm trying to not be a total asshole now, remember?"

Queenie laughed. "Yeah, I remember." Queenie made eye-contact with Jonathan who shot her a tired smile. "If you want to talk to Jonathan, now might be the best time."

Steve nodded getting up. "Queenie, seriously, thanks for everything."

Queenie smiled at him teasingly. "Don't get soft on me now, Harrington."

Steve chuckled walking over to where Jonathan sat.

Nancy took the seat Steve just occupied. "So, when did you and Steve become so close?"

"Don't worry, Nan, I'm not gonna steal your boyfriend," Queenie said cracking a smile.

Nancy laughed. "Not what I meant but good to know."

"Steve came to me after the fight, we talked things out," Queenie said picking at her cuticles. "We decided to start over because he said I'm the only one that's ever acted like a friend to him."

Nancy looked at the two teenage boys suspiciously nodding slowly. "I'm glad you guys are finally getting along."

Queenie looked at her friend smiling. "Now you just have to make up with him."

Nancy smiled biting her lip in nervousness. "What if Steve doesn't want me to?"

Queenie crossed her arms laying back into the couch. "Nancy Wheeler, trust me when I say that boy loves you." Nancy blushed. Queenie leaned forward. "But you can't forget the other boy that loves you." She nodded to Jonathan. Nancy blushed again. "It's your choice. Follow your heart. It might take a little bit of time for it to figure things out, but it'll never steer you wrong. Just promise me one thing?"

"Anything," Nancy said looking at the two teenage boys talking.

"You'll be smarter than me and tell him before it's too late," Queenie said.

Nancy nodded.

Steve stepped in front of the girls. "Hey, can I talk to Nancy?"

Queenie stood up. "Of course! I was about to go talk to Jon anyways!"

Queenie walked across the room to the kitchen table where Jonathan sat lost in thought. "Hey, mind if I sit here?"

Jonathan looked up at her worry etched into his features. He shook his head. Jonathan took her hand squeezing it in comfort.

"Don't worry," Queenie said barely above a whisper. "They'll find Will. They'll bring him back."

Jonathan gave her a forced smile. "I'm worried about him, Que."

"He'll never be the same," Queenie said thinking of her own PTSD. "But Will's a fighter, he'll get through it." Queenie brought his hand to her lips giving it a small kiss. "And we'll be there to help him, together."

Jonathan smiled. "Thank you, Queenie."

"For what, Jon?" She asked tilting her head in confusion.

"For everything. For always being around. For being a great friend. For taking an interest in things that make Will happy. Thank you so much," Jonathan said.

Queenie laughed squeezing his hand. "Jonathan, you're thanking me for being myself. You don't have to thank me for existing."

Jonathan snorted with laughter. "I'm serious, Que."

"I am too," She argued.

"Way to ruin a tender moment," he snorted.

Queenie smiled then turned to the mess of a house. "Speaking of ruined, the house is a lost cause. I don't think insurance covers monster attacks."

Jonathan laughed opening his mouth to reply before he was interrupted by the phone ringing. Crossing his way to it, he answered it. Everyone else held their breath as Jonathan took the call. He hung up after a few short words. "They found Will. He's at the hospital."

Jonathan and Queenie climbed into Jonathan's car and raced off to the hospital with Steve and Nancy following in Steve's car. As they bust through the doors, Queenie was met with her dad. She ran up giving him a hug.

"I missed you, papà," she whispered into his chest.

"I've missed you too, principessa," he replied, giving her a kiss on the head.

Jonathan was led to Will's room where he was reunited with his mom in the same fashion the Calabreses had been reunited.

Everyone else sat in the hospital waiting room in silence. Queenie hadn't had the courage to ask about Elle yet. Dustin and Lucas were asleep, but Mike seemed really sad about Elle's disappearance.

Jonathan opened the door making both Mike and Queenie perk up. He nodded. Mike jumped up shaking Dustin and Lucas. "Guys. Guys, he's up! Will is up. Guys, Will's up."

Queenie shot out of her seat hurling herself at Jonathan. Jonathan stumbled back a bit returning the hug slowly. Tears fell from her eyes staining Jonathan's jacket. "I was afraid he'd never wake up."

Jonathan squeezed the girl tighter in the hug as the boys rushed past them to see Will. Jonathan smiled taking Queenie's hand and leading her to Will's room.

The boys were tackling him in hugs when they arrived. Jonathan smiled laughing slightly. "Go easy on him."

Queenie smiled widely seeing the dark-haired boy. "Hey, Willie."

"Queenie!" Will exclaimed his grin widening, if that was even possible.

Queenie stepped around the boys planting a kiss on Will's cheek. This caused his entire face to flush red. "I've missed you so much."

"I-I uh um missed you too," he stuttered.

Queenie smiled stepping back to her place by Jonathan.

"You won't believe what happened when you were gone man," Lucas said.

"It was mental," Dustin exclaimed.

"You had a funeral," Lucas added.

"Jennifer Hayes was crying," Dustin added.

"And Troy peed himself," Lucas said.

"What?" Will asked.

"In front of the whole school!" Dustin exclaimed.

Queenie smiled at the boys reunion. She looked over to her best friend, Jonathan, who hadn't stopped smiling since the boys walked in. She reached over giving him another hug. Jonathan looked down at her giving her a look of pure joy. They broke apart, but Jonathan kept his arm around her shoulders.

Queenie looked back at the four boys and Joyce and took a picture of them with her polaroid. She held the developing photo out for Jonathan to see.

Will began coughing breaking the boys' excitement.

"You okay?" Mike asked.

"It got me," Will said. "The demogorgon."

"We know," Mike said quickly. "It's okay. It's dead." Queenie perked up at these words. "We made a new friend. She stopped it. She saved us. But she's gone now."

"Her name's Eleven," Dustin said.

"Like the number?" Will asked.

"Well, we call her Elle for short," Lucas explained.

"She's basically a wizard," Dustin continued.

"She has superpowers," Lucas whispered.

"More like a Yoda," Mike corrected.

Queenie smiled as the boys began explaining their new friend to Will. She touched her empty neck where her pendant should lay. "I'm going to miss her."

"Yeah," Jonathan whispered. "I think the boys will too."

Queenie leaned her head on his shoulder. "I'm glad Will's back. I don't want to ever lose someone like that again."

Jonathan squeezed her into his side giving her a kiss on the forehead. "We'll make sure it doesn't happen ever again."

Neither of them noticed Nancy watching the boys fondly behind them or the way her smile faltered at the kiss Jonathan gave Queenie. Nancy looked down then walked out of the hospital room catching both Queenie and Jonathan's attention. "Should we go talk to her?"

Queenie shook her head. "Give her some time."

Jonathan nodded in agreement and turned his attention back to the boys in front of them.

A month later, Jonathan and Queenie are in his car driving towards the Wheeler's to pick Will up. They had been out taking photos of the winter forest all day. Queenie's nonna had sent her a Nikon FA for Christmas, and Jonathan had promised her he'd teach her how to use it. The Byerses had also invited over the Calabreses for Christmas dinner. Joyce and Romeo were at the Byers's home cooking for most of the day.

As they made their way towards the basement, Queenie and Jonathan could hear a chorus of complaints. "Jeez, what's that smell?" Jonathan joked as they opened the door. "You guys been playing games all day or just farting?"

The boys laughed. "Oh that's just Dustin," Lucas said. "He farted. Dustin farted." He began blowing raspberries.

"Okay," Dustin said giving him a look. "Very mature, Lucas."

Queenie laughed. "I don't care who did it as long as I don't have to smell it much longer."

"Will," Jonathan said as Dustin and Lucas argued. "Come on."

"Bye guys," Will called.

"Bye Will," they called back.

Queenie smiled at Jonathan. "Hey, I'll be up in a sec." She said planting a kiss on his cheek. "Thanks for teaching me how to use my new camera. Next time you can show me how to develop film."

Jonathan smiled leading Will upstairs. Once the two Byerses were gone, the other three boys turned to Queenie with mischievous smiles.

"What?" She asked leaning onto their table to look at the board.

"What's going on between you and Jonathan?" Dustin asked in a teasing tone.

"Nothing!" She exclaimed. "We're just friends!"

"Oh yeah," Mike said sarcastically.

"Because I kiss just friends," Lucas added in the same teasing tone that Dustin spoke.

Queenie rolled her eyes. "I'm European."

"You were born in Texas," Dustin argued.

"I was raised by a European," she corrected. "I'll see you boys next week for the campaign, yeah?"

"If you're not too busy with Jonathan!" Lucas called teasingly as Queenie disappeared upstairs.

"Hey, Queenie," Karen Wheeler said as the girl came up the stairs.

"Oh, hey, Mrs. Wheeler," Queenie said smiling and stealing a gumdrop from the small pile on the counter. "Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas," She smiled. "And tell your dad Merry Christmas from us too."

"Of course," Queenie said smiling. "See you later, Mrs. Wheeler." Queenie smiled seeing Jonathan and Will waiting for her in the foyer.

She popped her head into the living room where Steve and Nancy sat.
"Merry Christmas, Steve, Nance!"

"Merry Christmas," they called back.

The three went out to Jonathan's car. Will kept looking at the box that Jonathan had carried out. "Can I open it?"

"Yeah, sure," Jonathan said starting the car.

It was a camera but because of the terrible lighting Queenie couldn't tell what type.

"Whoa, pretty cool," Will said.

"Yeah, pretty cool," Jonathan looked back at the Wheeler's house with a small smile on his face.

They arrived at the Byers's house to chaos in the kitchen as Joyce and Romeo tried to finish up the last of Christmas dinner. Jonathan started putting together his new camera and Will went to the presents under the tree. Smiling at the joy on everyone's face, Queenie stepped out onto the porch.

She looked up to the stars. "Hey Dom." She took a shaky breath. "So it's another Christmas without you. You would've loved Hawkins. I met the best people. I've lost some good people too. Dad's doing well. He still doesn't lie down for police, but he's finished one of his novels which has been sent to beta. He's going to write a book about everything that happened with Will, Barb, and the demogorgon. He's not sure if he should publish it as non-fiction, like it is, or just publish it as a fiction story. I met a girl named Elle. I gave my pendant to her. I'm sorry about that. I felt she needed it more than I did. You would've loved Elle. I'm one step closer to senior year. One more semester then it's finally senior year. I miss you so much." Queenie let her tears fall into the snow beneath her feet. "I hope to see you someday. I love you."

"Figlia! We've set the table," Romeo called from the door.

Queenie nodded. "Bye." She met her father at the door.

Romeo handed Queenie a pre-made plate and he had one in his hand as well. "We'll be right in. Please don't wait up."

Joyce nodded smiling at her sons.

Romeo and Queenie stepped out to the edge of the yard. Romeo bent down whispering in Italian. "Loreta, my love, I miss you more everyday."

"Dominique, my twin, I feel lost without you here," Queenie said in Italian. Both the Calabreses let their tears fall freely before placing the plates in the snow. They both sent a prayer up for the two lost family members before dumping the food and taking in Joyce's plates.

They met the three Byers with smiles on their faces. They joined the feast forgetting all the troubles for just a small moment.

10. Chapter 1: MADMAX

Queenie sighed, raking a hand through her newly blue hair. She took another drag of her cigarette trying to forget that she's only got a few more minutes of her break. It had almost been a year since everything with the demogorgon, and now Queenie was just trying to find ways to pay for college. She had applied for a few scholarships, but she's so indecisive about where she wants to go. College is why she had gotten this job. Looking at her watch she stamped out her cigarette and walked back into the arcade.

"Took an extra long break there, Queenie," Keith said as she walked in.

"Oh shove it, Keith, this time next year I won't even be in this dumb town," Queenie sneered shooting her coworker a glare. She looked down at the bag he was holding in disgust. "Do you have to eat that shit in front of me?"

"I don't know," He snapped. "Do you have to smell like cigarettes everyday you work here?"

"Something's gotta get me through shifts with you," she snapped glaring at him.

Keith rolled his eyes before getting called over by a group of kids who couldn't get a game to work properly.

Queenie rolled her eyes boredly helping people throughout the night. As she finished up fixing one of the machines, she heard from the aisle over. "I'm not prostituting my sister."

"But, it's for a good cause," Lucas exclaimed as Queenie rounded the corner.

"Whoa, whoa, none of you are selling Nancy for a date!" Queenie scolded then adding in a joking tone. "Steve would be pissed."

Keith glared at her.

"It's fine," Dustin said. "He's just gonna spread his nasty ass rash to the

rest of your family."

"Acne isn't a rash, and it isn't contagious, you prepubescent wastoid," Keith complained.

"Hey now, Dustin that wasn't nice," Queenie scolded giving him a look. "There's plenty of things to make fun of Keith for but his acne isn't one of them." She smirked. "You could make fun of him for his inability to get a date. His lack of friends. His terrible-"

"Shut it, Calabrese!" Keith snapped.

Queenie rolled her eyes. "What do you boys want to know?"

Lucas's eyes lit up. "Do you know who MadMax is?"

"Like the movie?" Queenie asked looking at the boys confused.

"No," Dustin exclaimed pulling her to the Dig Dug machine. "The person that scored the highest on this machine."

"Oh," Queenie shrugged uninterested. "Some fiery red-headed girl. Absolutely amazing at video games, but I've never seen her around before."

"A girl!?" the boys exclaimed.

"Don't sound so surprised," Queenie sneered. "It makes you seem like a sexist pig." She smirked, putting a hand on her co-workers arm. "Like Keith here." She looked at the boys the color from her face draining. "Where's Will?"

Queenie started searching the aisles for the youngest Byers boy. She started to hyperventilate not being able to find him.

"Que," Mike called. "I found him."

Queenie sighed in relief. She reached up touching her chest feeling the sun pendant that sat around her neck, it had been her brother's. She found comfort in it.

As the night dragged on, Queenie finally made it to closing time. She

was closing up the arcade, like she did most nights. Keith often closed up with her, but tonight he said he had somewhere to be. She didn't mind closing up alone. She had gotten used to it over the months she'd been working there.

She sighed vacuuming the carpet. "A few more months Dom, and then we're out of here for good." She hummed to herself as she finished up the last of the cleaning. She fiddled with the door key before heading towards the truck. She drove home on the quiet streets of Hawkins blissfully ignorant to the trouble to come.

Queenie woke up with a start. She had another nightmare. She didn't mind this time because she woke up just in time to get ready for school. She got dressed and did some light makeup. Queenie grabbed some toast and sat out on the porch waiting for Jonathan. While she waited, she lit up a cigarette. She took a drag of her cigarette taking a few bites of toast between each drag. Finally Jonathan's car pulled up, she smiled seeing Will in the front seat she made her way to the back. She stomped out the cigarette and slid in the back.

"Good morning boys," She said.

"Morning, Queenie!" Will said smiling.

"Morning, Que," Jonathan smiled at her.

"So, did you boys beat MadMax's score last night? I forgot to check during lockup," Queenie said.

"No," Will replied then began an entire explanation of no matter how hard they tried none of them could beat the score, at least not alone.

Jonathan pulled up to the school and Will dashed out to meet with his friends. Jonathan smiled seeing him run off. "It's good to see he's doing well."

"Yeah," Jonathan said. "As well as he can be."

Queenie shrugged putting on her backpack and grabbing another cigarette.

"How many a day do you go through?" Jonathan asked gesturing to

the now lit cigarette.

Queenie snorted. "Depends what kind of day it is." She took a drag of the cigarette.

Their conversation was cut short by a car engine revving then tires screeching. They watched as car with California plates pulled up to the school. A guy in all denim stepped out smoking a cigarette of his own.

"Who the hell is that?" Queenie mumbled to herself. She noticed the fiery little redhead from the arcade got out of the passenger seat. MadMax?

Queenie rolled her eyes finishing up the last of her cigarette and heading inside the building. Queenie grabbed her books and made her way to first period, Senior English. She sat at the back like she usually does, Steve took the seat on her left. "Hey, Harrington, how's the college application coming?"

"Not good," he replied. "I think I have to scrap the whole thing."

"That sucks, Harrington," She said.

"I mean," he shrugged. "I could always work for my dad and hang out around here for another year. Then I won't have to leave Nancy."

"Steve," Queenie motioned for him to come closer. He obliged. She hit him as hard as she could in the back of the head. "That is the stupidest fucking idea you've ever told me! And you've told me some really stupid ideas! Look! I get it you love Nancy, and she loves you, but I promise you leaving to get an education isn't going to ruin your relationship." Queenie bit her lip leaning towards her close friend. "What you've two got is special, okay? It can survive many trials. And if it doesn't, well, that's Nancy's loss."

Steve smiled. "You know you could've given me the heartfelt speech without insulting my girlfriend."

"Yeah," Queenie shrugged. "But where's the fun in that?" She smirked.

Steve snorted turning from her.

Queenie chuckled turning from him. She looked up at the board squinting to see what was written on it. Suddenly, someone passed in front of the board distracting her from trying to read it. It was the guy from earlier the one dressed in all denim.

The guy smirked when he caught Queenie's eye. He sat in the seat on her right before either of them could speak the bell rang and their English teacher, Mr. Wilde, stood up. "Alright class get out your books, we'll be discussing Animal Farm in full today." Everyone rummaged through their backpacks for the books except Queenie and the new guy.

"Miss Calabrese, care to explain why you don't have your book?" Mr. Wilde asked walking towards her desk, a stern look on his face.

"Certainly, sir," Queenie said smiling at him politely and folding her hands on the desk. "I found the book to be a complete lie to what it proclaimed to be. You said it was a piece of satire, but I found nothing satirical about Orwell's work. In fact, I found it to be degrading and biased. He showed a complete lack of understanding of tyranny and totalitarianism and the forces that drive both. He did not even on a basic level understand the fundamentals that drive these types of governments to power and how they work as less of a hindrance and more of a help in the beginning. There was no true understanding of a totalitarianistic government and how it works or how it is supported by so many. I believe at its basic level that it did well as a propaganda machine for the type of government that Americans seem to champion. And by far the worst part of it all was the comparison of followers of totalitarianism to be nothing more than farm animals, wild and dumb."

"While that is a wonderful analysis, I don't believe you understood what you read exactly," Mr. Wilde argued.

Queenie glared at him dropping her polite charade. "Oh, I understood what I read, sir. The one thing you forget though is my parents were born in and spent their childhoods in a totalitarianistic country. This fact alone means that I understand better than anyone in this class, yourself included sir, this novel. I am telling you that it is nothing like this novel wishes to portray it. In fact, the novel is too frank and outright about the horrors of totalitarianism, but it forgets to mention

the parts of totalitarianism that support the people thus why the people support it. While Orwell did well in advocating a democratic government, he did horrible in understanding why people live under different types of governments."

Queenie stood up from her chair. "Something Americans tend to forget while you were in your roaring twenties the rest of the world was starving, especially Europe. People had lost hope; they had lost faith. They were losing their lives. People don't go to totalitarianism because all they know is tyrants. People wave flowers at tyrants and listen to totalitarianism because it provides hope for the hopeless."

Queenie stopped to catch her breath. No one in the class said anything they were staring at her silently. Steve watched with pity in his eyes wanting to comfort his friend but not knowing how. The new guy watched her with interest. Queenie picked up her backpack walking towards the door. Before opening it she added in a quiet voice. "The book was wrong, so I burned it. That's why I don't have it." With that she stepped out of the classroom, the door slamming shut behind her.

She ran through the school feeling tears sting at her eyes. Finding her way out of the building she at against the wall finally letting the tears fall.

Her parents never talked much about their childhoods in Italy. There was a war and famine. Mussolini depicted everything differently to them. Though her grandparents understood that Italy was not a place they wanted to remain after the war, they didn't know the full extent of Mussolini's horrors until they were out of Italy. Her father's family was able to get out just after the war began, but her mother's family came to America towards the end of the war. Her father's family came to America because it wasn't in the war, but it soon joined the war. This warped their reality suddenly making them suspicious "Italian spies". Her mother's family knew to escape Mussolini's secret police they would have to get out of Europe. They arrived in America to suspicion of their reasons for being here. The Italian Civil War broke out after World War 2 officially killing any family they had left in Italy, isolating them in America. Though Mussolini was dead, they had no reason to return to Italy, so they tried to build a better life for themselves in America. And they did, her parents built a life free of

tyranny for her brother and her, until their fifteenth birthday. On their fifteenth birthday, those dreams of a better life in America for their children (one without starvation, horror, dehumanization, rape, etc.) shattered. And six months later, the American dream and the family that tried to fulfill it was half dead.

Queenie laid her head back lighting another cigarette today. She sat out there trying to calm down, debating whether she should call her dad to bring her home or not. As she contemplated this, the bell rang signifying the end of first period. She stood up, stamped out her cigarette, and made her way back inside the building.

"Hey," Steve said coming up beside her. "You okay?"

"Yeah," Queenie sighed looking over at him a smile tugging at her lips. "The entire book is just bullshit. I have nothing against Mr. Wilde. I'll probably go apologize during my free period or lunch or something."

Steve smiled. "Your outburst really changed his thoughts on the book." Steve slipped on sunglasses as they came up to the corner.

"What are you doing?" She asked chuckling at her friend.

"Shh," he hissed then ran over to where Nancy was at her locker. He grabbed her in a hug causing her to scream.

Jonathan rolled his eyes and started to walk away. Queenie smiled running up to his side. She gave him a slight shove with her shoulder. "Hey."

"Hey," Jonathan said smiling. He looked over noticing her red-rimmed eyes. "What's wrong?"

Queenie shook her head waving it off. "Got a little emotional talking about Animal Farm. Nothing too serious." She looked down noticing the orange flyer. "What's this?"

Jonathan handed it to her. "Oh, just some stupid flyer for a party. Nance was trying to convince me to go b-"

"We should go," Queenie interrupted smiling. "It's just the right

amount of teenage stupidity for my taste."

"Really, Que?" He asked giving her an annoyed look.

"Yeah," she put an arm around his shoulder. "Just imagine all the idiots, that are our classmates, and the incredibly embarrassing things they'll do." Queenie tapped the camera in her slightly open bag. "Imagine the blackmail opportunities."

Jonathan rolled his eyes. "Queenie, blackmail doesn't solve everything."

Queenie shrugged. "True, but it does solve most my problems." She smirked leaning her head into his chest. "So what do you say?"

Jonathan sighed. "Maybe."

Queenie groaned. "That's all I'm going to get out of you isn't it, Jon?"

He smiled. "Now, you understand me."

"Oh, hush," she said hitting his chest. "I'm your best friend. No one understands you better than I do."

Jonathan laughed wrapping the girl in a hug. "I know you're more upset than you say you are," he whispered. "You know I'm here for you right?"

Queenie nodded against his chest.

"Good," he gave her a kiss on the forehead before they went separate ways for their next classes.

During her free period, Queenie made her way to Mr. Wilde's classroom. She really hoped that he didn't have a class right now. She knocked timidly waiting for someone to come to the door.

"Queenie," Mr. Wilde said behind her.

She turned to face him. "Oh! Mr. Wilde! I came here to..." She bit her lip. "I came here to apologize... for the way I acted."

"Queenie, come in," He said opening his classroom door. She followed shutting it behind her.

"Sir, I'm really sorry for-"

Mr. Wilde held up his hand to silence her. "Queenie, don't apologize. You have a very different world experience than most of the students in my class. Your parents are immigrants from a country that founded facism. Please, don't apologize for not liking George Orwell's work. Your insight into the book and the flaws of Orwell as an author creates a newer meaning to the same tired routine of discussions in the past. I found it enlightening. That is to say Ms. Calabrese I enjoyed your..."

"Outburst," Queenie offered with a slight smile.

Mr. Wilde nodded. "I'm going to overlook you skipping my class this one time because it was a sensitive subject."

Queenie breathed a sigh of relief. "If it's all the same to you, sir, I'm still very sorry for how I acted."

Mr. Wilde nodded. "Don't let it happen again. Skipping my class that is, feel free to have... outbursts anytime you like."

Queenie smiled laughing slightly. "Thank you, Mr. Wilde."

He smiled. "You're welcome, Queenie. We have to stick together."

Queenie looked at him confused before noticing a picture on his desk. She picked it up looking at it closer.

Mr. Wilde nodded. "That's my boyfriend. I'd like to call him my husband, but the state won't let us."

Queenie smiled. She had never gotten the opportunity to get to know Mr. Wilde, but it felt good to know she wasn't the only queer in Hawkins. "Thank you for trusting me with this information."

Mr. Wilde smiled again. "Now, go, Queenie, go do something fun with your free time."

Later that night, Queenie sat on the Wheeler's porch step smoking a cigarette as Nancy and her waited for Steve so they could go over to Barbara's parents for dinner.

"Nan," she said taking a drag of her cigarette. "Do you ever feel like we should just tell them the truth? You know that Barb is... is dead?"

Nancy sighed. "I don't know, Que. H-how would we even approach that topic?"

Luckily, they didn't have to think about it anymore because Steve pulled up. Queenie stamped out her cigarette and hopped in the backseat. Nancy gave Steve a quick kiss, and they were off in silence. When they arrived, they walked up to the house hugging themselves against the cool October air.

"You ready?" Steve asked.

No, Queenie thought.

"Yeah," Nancy said and Steve rang the doorbell.

Marsha opened the door ushering the three of them in. As they sat down to eat, Marsha said. "I'm so sorry I didn't get to cook. I was gonna make that baked ziti you guys like so much, but I just forgot about the time and before you know it, "Oh my god it's five o'clock".

"It's fine," Nancy said. "It's great."

"Right," Steve agreed. "I love KFC."

Queenie smiled. "Next time, call me Marsha. I know plenty of quick recipes that my nonna would love if I made for others."

Marsha smiled giving a nod of thanks while taking a drink.

"So, I noticed a for sale sign out in your yard," Nancy said. "Is that the neighbors', or..."

They shared a look. "You wanna tell them?"

"Go ahead," James Holland said.

"We hired a man named Murray Bauman. Have you heard of him?" Marsha said looking excited.

The three teenagers shared a look shaking their heads. "No."

"No, I don't think so," Steve said.

"He was an investigative journalist for the Chicago Sun-Times," Marsha explained.

"He's pretty well-known," James said handing Queenie a business card. She looked at it before handing it off to Steve who handed it off to Nancy.

"Anyways, he's freelance now, and he agreed to take the case," Marsha explained smiling.

"That's... That's great," Steve said.

The Hollands smiled.

"No, that's really... that's great, right?" Steve said.

"Um, what exactly does that mean?" Nancy asked.

"Means he's gonna do what that lazy son of a bitch Jim Hop-"

Marsha cleared her throat putting a hand on James's arm to stop him.

"Sorry," he apologized then took a deep breath. "What the Hawkins police haven't been capable of doing. Means we have a real detective on the case."

"It means..." Marsha said her voice cracking. "We're going to find our Barb."

"If anyone can find her, it's this man," James added.

Marsha nodded.

"He already has leads," James continued. "By God, he's worth every last penny."

"Is that why you're selling the house?" Nancy asked.

"Don't worry about us, sweetie. We're fine," Marsha assured. "More than fine. For the first time in a long time, we're hopeful."

Queenie looked down at her hands containing the tears that threatened to fall. She reached out and took Martha's hand. She squeezed it encouragingly.

Nancy excused herself to the bathroom.

"He'll find Barb," Queenie whispered to the woman who gave her a smile.

Queenie waved goodbye to Steve and Nancy as she walked up to the door of the Byers's house. She was greeted at the door by Bob, Joyce's boyfriend.

"Queenie!" He greeted cheerfully with a smile.

Queenie smiled. "It's good to see you Bob!"

"Oh sweetie, you're here," Joyce said coming in and giving the girl a hug.

"Hey, Joyce," Queenie returned the hug smiling.

"I think Jonathan just went into Will's room if you want to-"

Queenie smiled. "Thanks, Joyce." She found her way to the open door of Will's bedroom. She hovered there when she noticed they seemed to be having a serious conversation of some sort.

"Stop treating me like that," Will snapped.

"What? Like what?" Jonathan asked bewildered.

"Like everyone else does," he snapped. "Like there's something wrong with me."

Queenie bit her lip. She knew that feeling.

"What are you talking about?" Jonathan asked.

"Mom, Dustin, Lucas. Everyone. They all treat me like I'm gonna break. Like I'm a baby. Like I can't handle things on my own," Will said. "It doesn't help. It just makes me feel like more of a freak."

Queenie knows what that's like. She knows the over-protectiveness that friends and family can take when something bad has happened. Her father has eased up since they moved to Hawkins and even more so now that she's an adult, but she's still fragile, still breakable. Like porcelain.

"You're not a freak," Jonathan said.

"Yeah, I am," Will argued. "I am."

"You know what," Jonathan sighed. "You're right. You are a freak."

"What?" Will asked.

"No, I'm serious," Jonathan said. "You're a freak. But what? Do you want to be normal? Do you wanna be just like everyone else? Being a freak is the best. I'm a freak."

"Is that why you don't have any friends?" Will asked.

Queenie snickered finally stepping into the room. "Hey, what am I last week's tuna fish?"

Will and Jonathan snickered.

Queenie stepped towards the bed putting an arm around Jonathan. "He's a freak. I'm a queer. We're the greatest of friends."

Will rolled his eyes. "Okay, then why don't you two have any other friends?"

"We have other friends," Jonathan said chuckling.

"Then why are you always hanging out with me?" Will asked.

Jonathan sighed. "Because you're my best friend. And I'd rather be best friends with Zombie Boy than with a boring nobody."

"Besides, Will," Queenie said leaning over to him. "There's no one I'd rather take on an epic quest than you." She kissed his cheek causing a faint blush to rise on the boy's cheeks.

"Look," Jonathan mumbled before speaking up. "Who'd you rather be friends with? Bowie or Kenny Rogers?"

"Ugh," Will scoffed shaking his head.

"Exactly," Jonathan said. "It's no contest. The thing is, nobody normal ever accomplished anything meaningful in this world."

"Do you think Marlon Brando became such an icon by being normal or sitting on the sidelines? Do you think Queen would be wildly popular if Freddie was boring and normal?" Queenie added. "You don't have to fit in to be something in this world, in fact, it helps if you stand out. And it's people like us, the freaks and queers, that change the world."

"You got it?" Jonathan asked.

"Well..." he smirked. "Some people like Kenny Rogers."

"Kenny Rogers?" Bob asked as he came by the doorway. "I love Kenny Rogers."

They shared an amused look as Bob walked into the room. The three of them burst into laughter.

"What's so funny?" Bob asked.

"Nothing," Will answered quickly.

Bob began looking through the vhs tapes. "Mr. Mom," he whooped. "Perfect."

They all began laughing again as Bob left the room.

"Come on boys," Queenie said taking both the Byers's hands. "You two promised me a movie night, and Jon still has to take me home afterwards."

"You know, Mom won't care if you stay over," Will said.

"Yeah," Queenie smiled. "I know. But someone has to chase my dad off to bed, so he doesn't stay up all night working on his latest manuscript."

They all settled in to watch the movie. In Queenie's opinion, it was kind of boring. Movie night had become a habit from when she used to come over to help Joyce or Jonathan was teaching her to use her camera. Now, it was mostly Will that asked her to come over for it because she was the only one that sort of understood what he was going through. It's very rare that both dinner at the Hollands and movie night at the Byerses landed on the same night, but anytime they did Queenie was in for a long night because she could never refuse one.

Jonathan and Queenie sat snuggled together. Jonathan looked like he would fall asleep at any second. "Oh," Queenie whispered getting Jonathan's attention. "The Hollands are selling their house."

"What?" Jonathan hissed trying not to disturb the others.

"Yeah," Queenie continued in a whisper. "Apparently, they paid some investigative reporter to find Barb, and I jus- I just- Jon, how do you tell someone that their only child is dead?"

Jonathan shifted pulling the clearly upset Queenie closer. "I don't know. We'll figure something out."

Queenie nodded sinking into his chest.

Queenie woke up to Joyce shaking both her and Jonathan awake. "Hey, do you need me to take her home?"

"No," Jonathan said rubbing the sleep from his eyes, his voice still hoarse. "I've got it."

Queenie stretched out. She tiredly followed Jonathan out to his car saying quick goodbyes to Joyce, Bob, and Will.

The ride to Queenie was silent, save for the radio. Unlike the ride with Steve and Nancy earlier that night, it was a comfortable silence.

Jonathan pulled into Queenie's driveway looking over to her with a small smile. "Thanks, Que."

"What for?" She asked looking at her confused.

"For being there for Will," he said. "It's sweet."

Queenie smiled. "I like Will. He's a great kid."

Jonathan smiled leaning slightly closer to her.

Queenie smiled getting a rush of bravery. She leaned forward giving him a kiss which he surprisingly returned. "Thanks for the ride!" She jumped out of his car and ran up to her front door. As she went inside, she looked back giving a small wave before disappearing from Jonathan's view.

Jonathan smiled to himself as he slowly put his car in reverse and backed out of their driveway. The entire drive home, the smile didn't leave his face.

Queenie bit her lip still surprised at herself for doing that. She headed upstairs to her father's study to find him asleep at the computer with a cold cup of coffee sitting beside him. She shook him awake sending him to bed before going to get ready for bed herself.

11. Chapter 2: Trick or Treat, Freak

Queenie tiredly fixed herself a cup of coffee before sitting down beside her father at the table. "How's the manuscript coming?"

"It's almost ready for an editor," he said taking a gulp of his own coffee. "I'm just making a few rewrites." Romeo looked over at his daughter. "What's on your mind, Principessa?"

"Papá," Queenie sighed putting down her cup. "IkissedJonlastnight."

Romeo's eyes widened as he processed what she had said. "You kissed Jon? As in Jonathan Byers? I thought you two were just friends."

Queenie groaned slumping in her seat. "We are... were..." She sighed. "I don't know anymore. I really like him, but he's my best friend. And I think he still likes Nancy."

"Figlia," Romeo said taking her hands in his. "Remember what happened with Barbara? Don't waste your chance by being too scared to act."

"I know, Papá," she said taking a gulp of her coffee. "And I'll tell him, okay?"

Romeo smiled. "Soon, figlia."

Queenie nodded finishing off her coffee. She kissed her dad on the cheek grabbed a jacket and backpack and headed out to the front porch. She hoped that what happened last night wouldn't make her and Jonathan's friendship awkward.

When he pulled up, she smiled waving. Today Will wasn't in the passenger seat, so she took it. "Hey," she said breathlessly.

"Hey," Jonathan said smiling.

Will watched the two with interest from the backseat. Something had changed, but he wasn't sure what.

When they made it to the school, Will quickly left to join his friends.

Queenie gathered her stuff not sure if she really wanted to face Jonathan yet.

"Hey," Jonathan put a hand on her arm causing her to stop and looking up into his pleading brown eyes.

Queenie bit her lip tears springing to her eyes. "Look, Jon about last night-"

Jonathan leaned forward capturing her sentence in a kiss. Queenie melted kissing back. They broke apart catching their breath. "It meant a lot to me, Que, but I still have some things to figure out."

Queenie nodded. "See you later, Jon."

She stepped out of the car making her way into the high school and towards her first period. As she walked deep in thought of what stage Jonathan and her were at, her thoughts were interrupted by someone walking up beside her. It was the new guy.

"Billy," he smiled. "And you are?"

"Queenie," she replied shortly.

"Ah, you're already a queen and here I was going to ask you to be mine," he smirked.

Queenie laughed, genuinely laughed. "No one's ever used that one."

Billy smiled. He wrapped an arm around Queenie. "What you did yesterday in class? That was fucking amazing."

Queenie's cheeks turned a light shade of pink. "It wasn't. I felt really bad about it afterwards."

"Why?" Billy looked at her confused his hand traveling down her back.

"Because," she forcefully moved his hand back up causing him to chuckle. "I was really rude."

Billy shook his head. As they made it to the English classroom, they

stepped away from each other. "Seriously, Queenie." He had lost his mischievous smile. "You're really pretty." He winked then went to his seat.

Queenie blushed and took her seat next to Steve who was glaring at Billy.

"Why were you with him?" Steve hissed.

"We were just talking Steve," Queenie patted his arm. "Don't worry, we're not even friends."

Romeo smiled at his daughter who had dressed in a Wonder Woman costume for the party she would be attending. "Now, if you drink I want you to call me to pick you up, okay?"

"Of course, dad," Queenie said giving him a kiss on the cheek. "But don't worry Steve and I are the designated drivers."

Romeo smiled. "Aww, you two are growing up!" He wiped a fake tear. Romeo had grown fond of Steve Harrington as the friendship between him and Queenie grew. Steve often came to the Calabreses when his parents were fighting or his dad was drinking. He had spent many nights crashed at their place, just as Queenie had offered when they were almost friends.

Queenie grabbed a jacket and noticed something out the window. It was Jonathan's car. She was going to go to the Byers and pick him up demanding he go to the party with her, but there he was in front of her house, well technically the Wheeler's house.

Smiling Queenie slipped on her jacket and stepped out into the October air. As she stepped out, Will stepped out of Jonathan's car. "Hey, boys, you look good!"

"Queenie!" The boys exclaimed running over and attacking her in a group hug.

"Oh," she stumbled back a bit. "Have fun, boys! Love y'all. I'm gonna go convince Jon to go to a party with me."

"Are you and my brother dating?" Will asked as she walked towards his car.

"We're just friends!" She yelled before slipping into the passenger seat of Jonathan's car.

"Not taking the invisible jet, Wonder Woman?" He asked jokingly.

"It's in for repairs," Queenie replied smiling at him. "So what do you say? It'll be totally lame without you."

"I'm not even in costume," Jonathan complained.

"Who cares?" Queenie waved it off. "Pleeeeeease."

Jonathan sighed then started up the car. They found their way to Tina's with the party already in full swing. Queenie and Jonathan were almost immediately separated by the crowds. Queenie went off to find herself a drink now that she wasn't driving. She grabbed a beer bottle cracking it open and taking a drink.

"Whoa, queer, what are you doing here?" The obnoxious voice of Tommy asked from behind her.

Queenie rolled her eyes. "Currently, I'm not sure, but a few minutes ago it was your girlfriend so... watch out." She walked away from him only to run face first into the bare chest of someone. She looked up to see familiar mischievous eyes. "Billy!"

Billy smirked looking her up and down. His eyes lingered on the lasso hung at her belt. "So, you gonna tie me up with the lasso of truth, Wonder Woman?"

Queenie smirked leaning towards him. "Only if you lie to me." She took another swig of her beer.

Billy took her free hand. "Come on," he started leading her closer to the speakers. "Dance with me."

Queenie chugged the rest of her beer, throwing it down on the ground as she let Billy lead her to the dancefloor. They began moving slightly together. "Ugh! I need a-"

"Cigarette?" Billy smirked holding one up for her. "I'm way ahead of you, sweetheart."

"Yes!" Queenie leaned forward taking the cigarette between her teeth and slowly wrapping her red stained lips around it trying not to ruin her lipstick. Billy lit up the cigarette for her and one for himself as they continued to move together throughout the party.

"So," she began. "Why me? I mean you have every girl in Hawkins High lusting after you, and you flirt with me?"

Billy chuckled letting out a puff of smoke. "Maybe I want something more than lust, and I think you could be that."

Queenie snorted pulling the cigarette out of her mouth. "If only I believed that. Lucky for you, I really don't care if it's true right now."

Billy smirked running his hands up and down her sides. He pulled her closer as she leaned in. Suddenly there was an exclamation from the people around them. Queenie looked over to see Nancy covered in red punch, and Steve stressed.

Nancy glared at Steve. "What the hell?"

"Nance," Steve said as she stormed off past him.

"I better go check on girl next door, she doesn't usually drink this much," Queenie said patting Billy's chest. "But this has been fun. See you later?"

Billy smirked. "You better."

Queenie nodded. Navigating through the crowd towards where Nancy and Steve disappeared. Queenie saw the bathroom door close and decided to wait outside it for them. She could hear the muffled sounds of an argument.

She stepped closer to the door to hear from Nancy. "You're bullshit!"

"What?" Steve stammered.

"You're you're pretending like everything is okay," Nancy continued.

"You know, like we didn't... like we didn't kill Barb. Like, it's great. Like, we're in love and we're partying. Yeah, let's party, huh? Party. We're partying." She was drunk, very drunk. There's no telling what was in that. "Thi-this is bullshit."

"Like we're in love?" Steve asked, his voice cracking with tears.

"It's bullshit," Nancy declared in her inebriated state.

"You don't love me?" Steve asked.

Queenie stepped away from the door not wanting to hear Nancy's answer. She felt she had invaded their privacy too much already.

Steve stepped out slamming the door behind him. His eyes connected with Queenie's. "What!?" He snapped tears filling his eyes. "Is our friendship bullshit too?"

"Steve," Queenie said reaching out to him. "Of course, it isn't." Queenie bit her lip. "If you need someone, you can come to me."

"Thanks, but I don't need your pity," he hissed and stormed off.

Glaring at the door, Queenie walking in seeing Nancy. "WHAT THE FUCK IS WRONG WITH YOU NANCY!?" She yelled.

"It's bullshit," Nancy said glaring at Queenie.

"Nancy, I don't care about how you feel about Steve, that's not how you treat a person!" Queenie snapped. "And you know what you're not the only one that feels guilty about Barb! I hate to break it to you, but you're not the only one that cared about her!"

"You-you're bullshit! You act out to get noticed. And th-then you say you can't help it, but you-you're just an attention-seeking queer," Nancy said glaring at her.

"AND YOU'RE A BITCH, NANCY WHEELER," Queenie shouted not noticing when she bit her lip causing bloody to leak out of her mouth onto her chin. "You always have been a bitch, and you'll always be a bitch. If you pulled your head out of your ass for five seconds, you'd notice there are other people in the world and the universe doesn't

revolve around you, princess."

Queenie stormed out of the bathroom leaving the door open. As she found her way back into the main living area, she ran into Jonathan. "Take that drunk bitch home!" She hissed.

"W-what happened?" Jonathan asked.

"I don't want to talk about it," Queenie shouted back at him as she stormed through the house.

"You're bleeding," Jonathan called before going to find Nancy.

Queenie stormed out of the house and sat down on the porch step. She went to Jonathan's car and grabbed her jacket and cigarettes before returning to the step she had previously been sitting on. She lit up a cigarette, and contemplated Nancy and her fight. Maybe Nancy was right, maybe she is an attention-seeking queer. Queenie lit up the cigarette and took a long drag of it.

"Here," someone handed her a towel and sat down beside her. She looked over to be met with the face of Billy. "You know," he began wiping her bloody chin and lip. "You're right. She is a bitch, but why do you think so?"

Queenie took another drag of her cigarette offering one from the pack to Billy who took it with a nod. He lit up his cigarette as Queenie began to speak. "She only ever thinks of herself." Queenie took a drag glaring into the space in front of her. "And she broke my only friend in this senior class's heart."

"So, you called her a bitch," Billy said taking a drag.

"Along with other things." Queenie smirked taking another drag.

Billy put his hand on her leg in a comforting gesture. Queenie leaned her head on his shoulder. She didn't care if it was a fling. It was nice to have someone like only her for once, not her and Nancy, or not even her at all.

The two sat smoking in silence. Billy's hand moving from her outer leg to her inner thigh. Finally as their cigarettes began to fade,

Queenie did something reckless and stupid that she may come to regret later. "Do you want to makeout?"

Billy chuckled flicking the last of his cigarette away. "Sure."

"Good," Queenie said throwing her cigarette aside and moving to his lap. "Because I need this."

She pressed her lips to his in a heated, passionate kiss. The passionate kiss turned into a million smaller ones their tongues fighting for dominance over the other. A fight that Billy won when he pulled her further down his lap. Billy trailed kisses down her jawline through her neck to her exposed chest. Queenie mumbled in Italian giving small moans and gasps as he found his way around her.

Billy continued to pepper her with kisses finding a sweet spot on her chest that he marked.

"Billy," Queenie breathed. "I don't have a ride home."

"I can take you home," he mumbled before continuing to kiss her.

"You're drunk," she said keeping in a squeal as he sucked on another sweet spot.

"I can drive," Billy mumbled smirking as he left another visible spot.

"I'll drive," Queenie said. "Then we get to my house, you can sober up and go home." Queenie produced his keys from his pocket pushing him off her.

Billy growled glaring at Queenie. He grabbed her wrist a little too tightly. "Never do that again."

Queenie nodded in understanding before letting him lead her to his car. Queenie got in the driver's seat making her way carefully to her house. Billy kept a hand on her knee the entire time ensuring her that the car could go faster than that, and she should.

Queenie pulled up into her driveway, surprised to find that her father's and hers cars weren't the only ones there. Queenie helped Billy up the steps as she stepped inside she was met with the worried

faces of her father and Steve.

"Steve," Queenie said leading Billy towards their kitchen as Steve and Romeo followed. "What are you doing here?"

Steve looked between Queenie and Billy seeing the hickies on her neck. He shot Billy a glare before returning his attention to Queenie. "I came over to apologize for snapping at you. You didn't deserve that."

Queenie chuckled. "Don't worry, Steve, I get it."

Steve smiled wrapping his friend in a hug which she returned.

Romeo hugged her next giving her a kiss on the head. "I'm glad you got home safe. Who's this that brought you home?"

"Oh! Papá meet Billy. Billy this is my dad, Romeo," she introduced the two. "Billy just moved her from California."

Billy smiled looking a little uncomfortable. "See you later, Queenie." Billy leaned over to kiss her cheek and whisper. "If Steve stays over, tell me or you're in trouble."

Queenie swallowed nervously before nodding. "See you tomorrow!" She didn't know what they were exactly because they didn't hook up or anything they just made out. Maybe Billy wants to hookup with her, so the makeout session was a way to get to that.

"Hey, I'll go to," said Steve not taking his glare off Billy. "Talk to you tomorrow, Queenie."

Queenie nodded waving goodbye to the boys as they left the house. She turned to her father when the front door shut. "That was odd."

Romeo chuckled. "Odd isn't the word I'd use."

"Look, Hargrove," Steve snapped as soon as the front door was closed. "I don't know what you're playing at, but if you hurt Queenie-"

"You'll what, Harrington?" Billy asked shoving him. "You'll what? What could you do to me, Harrington? Besides what is Queenie to

you? She's not your girlfriend-"

"She's my best friend," Steve growled.

Billy smirked. "Well, here's the thing, Harrington, she's mine. She's fallen for these charms, and she's taken the bait. She's trapped."

Steve glared at him taking a step towards him before Billy stormed past him to his car and sped off into the night.

With a sigh, Steve looked at Queenie's front door knowing that he was doing a shit job at being a best friend. He glanced at the Wheeler's house and felt guilt. He felt guilty for being a shit boyfriend. All around in his eyes, Steve was shit.

12. Chapter 3: The Polywog

Queenie got up wiping the sleep from her eyes. She grabbed a hoodie to hide the hickeys Billy left and jeans. She walked downstairs expecting to see her dad but only found a note on a banana sat out. It was written in Italian:

"I went to see my editor. Don't forget to eat. Love you! -Dad"

Queenie smiled grabbing the banana and heading out to her truck. She ate as she drove to school dreading the conversation she would have with Jonathan. As she pulled up, she noticed Steve a few spaces away. She smiled stepping down from her truck towards his car.

Suddenly she was grabbed from behind in a hug and spun around. She squealed hitting the person's arms. They put her down. She turned around to meet the mischievous eyes of Billy.

"Stop!" She whined hitting his arm again. "You gave me a heart attack."

Billy chuckled leaning towards her lips.

Queenie turned her head.

"What's wrong?" He asked resting his hands on her hips.

"We're not even together," Queenie replied.

"So? Who cares?" He leaned forward trying to capture another kiss.

Queenie put her hands up to block his lips. "Look I barely know you."

"So," he smirked leaning back on his heels. "Let's get to know each other. Tonight."

"I have work," she said.

Billy chuckled. "I can wait until afterwards."

Queenie tapped her chin in thought. "Maybe."

Billy smirked watching her as she walked away. She walked straight into Steve who was glaring at Billy.

"Hey, I was coming to see you," She said. "How are you doing?"

"I've been better, Queen," he sighed looking at her with soft eyes.

"It'll get better Stevie," she said. "Come over tonight after my shift, we can watch movies and eat hot chocolate."

Steve shrugged. "I don't know." He sighed his shoulders slumping. "It sucks that it wasn't the same for her."

Queenie smiled sadly. "Then it's her loss."

Steve returned the smile, but it wasn't genuine. "Come on, Queen. We've got to get to first period."

"Let's go, Stevie," she said wrapping her arm around his waist as he wrapped his arm around her shoulders.

"Queenie! Queenie, will you just talk to me?" Nancy yelled following the blue haired girl through the halls.

Queenie spun on a dime seething. "Fuck off, Nancy! Can you do that for me? Can you just fuck out of my life? I mean I know I'm just an attention-seeking queer, but I really don't want yours."

Nancy stepped back in shock. "Did... did I say that Que?"

"Yeah, Nance," Queenie sneered. "Ya did."

"Queenie, I was drunk," Nancy argued.

"That doesn't mean that you didn't mean it," Queenie snapped. Nancy bit her lip, trying to hold back tears. "So, could you kindly fuck off?"

Queenie slammed down a pack of quarters. "I'm just so mad at her, ya know?"

Queenie turned to face Keith. "I have every right to be, right?"

"I mean, she did say something horrible things," Keith agreed.

"Yes! Exactly!" Queenie exclaimed. "Like I know she was drunk, but people are more truthful when they're drunk."

"That's what they say," Keith said taking a swig of the coke in his hand.

Queenie sighed in frustration. "I just don't get it! Why now?"

Keith shrugged. "She did get one thing right?"

"What's that?" Queenie asked.

"You act out a lot," Keith smirked taking another drink.

Queenie laughed. She smiled at him. "You know, Keith? You're not as bad as I thought."

"Queenie, I literally just let you rant to me," Keith said. "We're coworkers. What was my alternative?"

"Shut up, I'm trying to be sincere." Queenie snickered.

"You? Sincere?" Keith joked.

Queenie slapped his arm before going to help a customer. She spent the next few hours helping customers, exchanging money for change, and angrily telling Keith all of the problems in her life.

"So like Steve doesn't like him, and I'm not sure if I do," Queenie cleaned the counter with a rag. "But like, Jonathan likes Nancy more than he likes me at least romantically, so even though he's an asshole at least he's someone interested in me." Queenie sighed leaning on her elbow. "He does have his sweet moments."

"Well," Keith leaned on the counter beside her. "What do you think you should do?"

Queenie huffed. "Be a stupid teenager. Make stupid decisions. See

who will actually be there for me."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Keith asked.

"It means," Queenie turned to put up the rag. "If I go out with Billy, and it ends up he is a total douche then the people that care about me will stick around."

"That's a really dumb idea," Keith said.

Queenie glared at him. "I'm a teenager! I'm allowed to be dumb!"

"I never said you couldn't be!" Keith put up his hands in defense. "You asked me for my opinion. That's my opinion."

"Fuck it," Queenie mumbled walking out the arcade.

"Queenie!" Keith yelled at her retreating figure. "Your shift isn't over for another hour."

"Cover for me Keith, and I'll take one of your shifts next week," she yelled disappearing through the door.

Queenie got in her car driving over to the Byers's house.

"Queenie!?" Joyce exclaimed seeing the girl.

"Hey, is Jonathan here?" Queenie asked.

Joyce shook her head.

Queenie looked up at Joyce with sorry eyes. "Tell him it's nothing personal; I just don't want to be anyone's second choice."

Queenie turned on a dime and slammed the door of her truck. She hit the steering wheel debating with herself before pulling it into gear again.

Considering the size of the town Hawkins, Queenie was surprised it didn't take longer for her to find Billy. With Shadows of the Night blasting through her radio, Queenie rolled down her truck's window yelling to get Billy's attention.

Upon seeing the blue-haired girl, he smirked.

"Do you want to get to know each other?" She yelled.

Billy smirked looking over at the girl that sat in his passenger seat. They had already been to as Queenie put it "everywhere fun in town", so she was now directing him to a small glade in the forest she had found while taking pictures with Jonathan.

"Take this next left," she said. "You'll have to slow down. It's a dirt road."

Billy did as she said, glancing at the girl who was doing her best to contain her excitement.

They had been talking all night and gotten to know each other well. Billy's dad was married to Max's mom, and she had gotten transferred to Hawkins with her work. Queenie had talked about how it was just her and her dad. She told him that her brother and mother were dead. They had talked about their likes and dislikes, what it was like where they used to live, and how adjusting to Hawkins has been. Queenie soon realized that even though he was an asshole sometimes that wasn't all to him.

"Here," Queenie said getting him to stop the car and park it. She got out and climbed onto a low branch of an oak tree.

Billy snickered shaking his head and climbed up after her carrying something. He sat beside her before handing her a bottle of whiskey.

Queenie smiled taking a swig. The liquid burned it's way down her throat. She passed the bottle back to Billy who smirked as he took a swig. As they passed the bottle back and forth, they began to talk more about literally anything.

"I just think it's stupid," Queenie complained.

"Yeah," Billy agreed nodding his head. He looked in the bottle to only see a bit left. He held it out to Queenie. "You want the last bit?"

"You're just trying to get me drunk, Billy," she snickered shoving him over a bit. "I'm already pretty drunk." Queenie leaned her head on his shoulder.

Billy chugged the rest of it throwing down the bottle. "Is that so?" He snickered.

Queenie nodded. She closed her eyes enjoying the moment.

Billy shifted making Queenie look up at him with curious eyes. His blue eyes shone with the intoxication. She leaned up their lips meeting a short kiss that slowly grew more passionate.

They pulled away, breathing heavily. "Queenie," Billy whispered resting his forehead on hers. "Be mine?"

Queenie snickered. "I thought you were gonna fuck every girl in Hawkins, why tie yourself down now?"

"Maybe I want to fuck one particular girl in Hawkins," Billy smirked. "Come on. What do you have to lose?"

Queenie thought about. She looked out at the glade remembering the first time Jonathan had shown it to her.

"Come on Queenie," Jonathan said holding her new camera. "Get on that low branch."

"Jon! I'll break myself!" Queenie complained.

He rolled his eyes chuckling. "You won't just get up there. It'll make a great shot!"

Queenie rolled her eyes climbing up on the snow covered limb. "I'm gonna freeze to death," she mumbled.

Jonathan snickered before taking the shot.

Queenie smiled at the memory, but the happiness was ruined when she thought of everytime he looked at Nancy. Queenie thought of everytime she chickened out on telling Barbara how she felt then finding out she was dead.

"Absolutely nothing," she said looking into Billy's eyes.

Billy smirked capturing her in a passionate kiss. The kiss deepened, and he pushed her back on the limb. Billy kissed down her jawline finding new sweet spots.

"Billy," Queenie mumbled. "Billy, we can't do it on a limb. We'll break ourselves."

Billy snickered. "Well, where else do you suggest we go?"

Queenie smirked. "My dad went to see his editor. I've got the house to myself."

Billy smirked jumping down from the limb. He turned and picked Queenie off the limb carrying her to his car. He gave her little kisses while she giggled.

Queenie pulled Billy upstairs to her bedroom. Throwing a shoe at it, the boombox turned on blasting (one of her mother's favorite songs) Heartbreaker through her speakers. She shoved Billy onto her bed. He smirked.

Queenie slipped her shirt over her head then climbed on top of Billy pulling his off as well.

Billy smirked rolling over on top of her. He kissed down her neck and chest. With one swift flick, he undid her bra and tossed it to the side. His hands were instantly on her breasts.

Queenie bit her lip closing her eyes in ecstasy. Suddenly, flashes of someone else's hands on her passed through her mind, of pain and degradation. She could hear her whimpers of the man to stop. The pain of her body and vagina returning. She didn't even notice herself struggling with the button of Billy's pants because she wanted to stop but didn't know how to.

Luckily, she didn't have to say anything because there was a banging on the front door down stairs so frantic and loud that they could hear it over the music. Billy groaned in frustration while Queenie sat up

grabbing her hoodie.

"It's probably just one of the kids," she said slipping the hoodie over her head. "I'll go see what they want."

"Get rid of them," Billy growled. He slapped her ass as she walked out of the door. She gave him a pointed look making her way downstairs not noticing him silently follow her.

"Steven?" Queenie opened the door to a frantic looking Steve Harrington.

"Hey," Steve tried to look into the house to see if anyone else was in the vicinity. Billy stood out of his and Queenie's view. "You said I could come over, and when I didn't see your car, but I saw Billy's I got worried. Is everything alright?"

"Oh," Queenie bit her lip. "Yeah. Everything's fine. My truck had a bit of trouble, and I left my cables and stuff here. Billy saw me having trouble and offered to take me home."

Steve gave her a worried look. "I don't like you being alone with him."

"Steve," Queenie rolled her eyes. "Just because you two don't like each other doesn't mean I can't hang out with both of you."

"I jus-"

"You and Jonathan don't like each other," Queenie argued.

Steve sighed. He couldn't deny that statement. "Where is Billy?"

"Bathroom," Queenie shrugged.

Billy stepped out from behind the corner of the wall. "Hey, ready to go?" He smirked seeing Steve. "What's up, Harrington?"

Steve glared at him.

"We're gonna go get my car," Queenie said. "Be back in like twenty minutes."

Steve mumbled something under his breath that Queenie didn't catch before giving her a forced smile and nod.

Billy put his hand on the small of Queenie's back and led her out to his car.

"I don't like you talking to Steve," he growled.

"Billy," Queenie leaned over giving him a kiss on the cheek. "He's my best friend. You're the one I'm dating."

"I don't like him," Billy mumbled more to himself than her.

"You don't have to, but he's still my b-"

"Queenie!" Billy snapped turning his angry eyes to her. "I don't like the idea of you alone with him! Which you seem to be. All. The. Time."

Queenie put her hands up in defense. "Okay, I'll stop hanging out with him so much."

Billy smirked. "Good." He bit his lip glancing at her. "He did interrupt us though."

Queenie snickered. "We'll have to pick up later." She didn't mention her second thoughts about everything worried that he would get angry again.

13. Chapter 4: Will the Wise

Queenie woke up stumbling downstairs. She thought of yesterday. Billy had been insistent on not letting Steve stay over, but with her dad gone to talk to editors and publishers and Billy being over, Steve wasn't hearing to her pleas for him to leave.

Steve was already in the kitchen fixing himself a cup of coffee. "Queen," he bit his lip.

"What is it, Stevie?" she asked pouring herself a cup as well.

"Why are you hanging out with Hargrove? He's a douche." Steve said taking a sip of his coffee.

Queenie sighed setting her cup down. "He might very well be, but I... I want to be a stupid teenager. And make bad decisions. And date a stupid guy. And... and I won't be anyone's second choice. And yeah Billy probably only wants to have sex then move on, but can you blame me for wanting something superficial like that?" She looked at Steve with pleading eyes. "The first person I loved, romantically, ended up killed by some crazy monster, and now the second person I love, romantically, is in love with the girl that you love. So sue me for wanting to have a superficial high school relationship before I graduate or get my heartbroken again."

Steve stared into his coffee running over everything she had said. "Whoa! Wait a second, did you say superficial relationship!? Are you two-"

Queenie nodded. "Yeah. But it's not like we're in love. It won't last long. It's just fun, fantasies, you know?"

Steve sighed knowing that arguing with her was a moot point. "If that douche hurts you, I'm going to kill him."

Queenie smirked. "He can't hurt me if there's no feelings involved."

Steve snickered shaking his head. The two friends finished their coffee in silence before heading out to their respective cars.

Someone grabbed Queenie from behind pulling her behind a wall. Queenie slammed an elbow down on whoever grabbed her, but they didn't even flinch. She was forcibly turned around to meet the snickering face of Billy.

She lightly hit him with her notebook. "You." Hit. "Have." Hit. "To." Hit "Stop." Hit. "Doing." Hit. "That."

Billy snickered. He leaned in to kiss her, and she met his lips. They deepened the kiss, tongues and teeth clashing. "So," Billy kissed her jawline. "Harrington, knows about us." He snickered as Queenie let out a whimper. "He doesn't like us."

Queenie giggled. "Yeah, I know. He's told me."

Billy found his way back to her lips and kissed her passionately. "You know," he bit her bottom lip roughly. "He's getting kind of annoying." Billy sucked on Queenie's lip causing a small whimper to come from the blue-haired girl. "Always interrupting us. Telling his opinion on us."

Queenie rolled her eyes. She pulled Billy closer. "Ignore him." Queenie pulled herself from his teeth. She leaned to his ear whispering. "There's much more interesting things in Hawkins than Steve Harrington." She licked his neck before pulling him into another kiss.

Billy smirked into the kiss. "Wanna skip next period?"

Queenie smiled. She jumped up wrapping her legs around his waist. "What are we doing?"

Billy smirked carrying towards an empty computer lab and locking the door behind them.

"I'm serious, Queen," Steve insisted. "He isn't going to treat you right! You should hear the wa-"

"Oh, like the way you used to speak about women was okay?" Queenie snapped having enough of Steve's lecture. They were sitting in their final period just waiting for the bell that signified their freedom. Steve had been using the entire period to tell Queenie how bad of a person Billy is.

"I never said that," Steve argued.

"Look, Stevie, I appreciate the concern, but if Billy were a good person, I wouldn't be dating him right now." Queenie said. "The whole point of being a stupid teenager and making shit decisions is to make shit decisions. I just... I need a break from everything good, ya know?"

Steve gave her a look. "That doesn't mean you put yourself through a relationship with a horrible person."

"Look, Steve!" She snapped. "Not everyone is as perfect as Nancy Wheeler!" Queenie's eyes widened, and she put both of her hands over her mouth. "Steve... I am so sorry. I didn't mean to. I was just angry."

"Queenie," Steve put a hand on her wrist causing Queenie to wince in pain. "It's okay."

Queenie smiled at him in thanks. She opened her mouth to say more but was interrupted by the bell signifying the end of the day.

Queenie ran out of the school towards her truck only pausing when she was in the front seat. She let her forehead fall on to the steering wheel as she relayed what had happened earlier.

Things were getting hot and heavy as they had the night before, then just as the night before again. The flashes, the pain, the fear building up in her throat. Then she started screaming. She yelled at him to "Please stop!" and "Please don't do this!", but she couldn't see Billy anymore. She didn't know where she was. She could just feel someone push her wrist down into the surface she was sitting on and a hand over her mouth. Then she whispered. "Please don't hurt Dom." That's when whoever was touching her completely stopped.

Queenie collapsed on the floor and sobbed loudly. When she was able to tell where she was, Billy stood over her shirtless with a look that was a mixture of confusion, concern, and anger.

Queenie looked up to see Billy leaning against his car as Max walked up. They seemed to be discussing something, and Billy seemed doubly annoyed.

Queenie put her truck in gear and drove towards the arcade, trying not to think about the newest episode or trigger situation.

Queenie sat at the counter of the arcade just waiting for those last fifteen minutes out before she could close up for the night. She flipped idly through a Wonder Woman comic book. By the time, the last group of kids slipped out of the arcade. It was five minutes to closing. Seeing no reason to keep it open longer. Queenie began the closing up process.

The lights around her flickered making the hair on the back of Queenie's neck stand up. She turned off the vacuum stepping around the arcade machines on high alert. The power flickered again making Queenie take in a sharp breath. The air around her turned cold and she was plunged into darkness.

Queenie looked around at the now broken down arcade. She knew where she was the Upside-Down.

"I don't want to be here," she yelled in Italian.

"You better let me out," she continued in Italian stepping towards the door.

It seemed to be storming outside. There was a giant shadowy figure and red lightning. With a crack of lightning, she was back in her world in the arcade. Queenie shrugged it off for now promising herself to tell her dad, when she got home.

She finished cleaning up the arcade and locked up. She drove home not being able to shake the feeling of someone or something watching her.

"Hey, Dad, I'm home!" Queenie yelled in Italian as she came in the front door.

"Princess, we have to go to the Byers," Romeo answered in Italian appearing in front of her. "Something's wrong with Will."

The Calabreses made it over to the Byerses only to find Hopper and Joyce putting together drawings of scribbles that Will was still making.

"They connect," Hopper explained.

"We're trying to put together the puzzle," Joyce said.

Queenie and Romeo nodded before grabbing a few papers themselves helping put together the giant intricate puzzle.

Soon, they had these drawings covering Joyce's house.

"Does this mean anything to you?" Hopper asked.

"No," Joyce replied gesturing frantically. "Is it some sort of maze or a road. I mean, it's sort of forking and branching like... like lightning."

"Will, can draw," Queenie said. "Look at the way it's shaded like it's rounded."

"Like tunnels," Romeo mumbled.

"What?" asked Joyce.

"Like tunnels," Romeo said louder. "Like tunnels underneath the town. We had them all over Italy."

"There aren't any tunnels like that under Hawkins," Joyce said. "And he said it was spreading; tunnels don't spread."

"Killing," Hopper said. "He said they were killing." He stepped towards his jacket and coat. "Vines." He put his things on and opened the door. "He's drawing vines."

14. Chapter 5: Dig Dug

Joyce tried calling Hopper again but got no answer. Romeo sat down beside Queenie who was deep in thought.

"Papà," Queenie looked up at him with tears in her brown eyes. "I... I found another situation that triggers flashbacks."

Romeo raised his eyebrows in question wrapping an arm around Queenie.

"It-it's s-sex," she said falling into sobs. "Be-because I was-"

"Hey, hey, shhh" Romeo pulled her into a hug smoothing her hair.

Queenie sobbed into his chest unable to form words.

"It's okay, principessa," he said kissing her head.

Queenie sniffed loudly wiping her tears away. "While I was closing up, I ended up in a flashback zone like the Upside Down."

"Wait, what did you say?" Joyce asked sitting down on Queenie's other side.

"I don't know what happened," Queenie explained. "One second, I'm in the arcade closing up then all the lights flicker and shut off, and I'm in the Upside Down."

"That's like what would happen to Will," Joyce said.

"But, I have no reason to be connected to it," Queenie said shivering against the cold. "I only went in for a few minutes."

"Maybe only a few minutes is all this monster needs," Romeo said.

"But," Queenie protested. "I don't feel any of the symptoms Will does."

"Maybe," Romeo squeezed his daughter. "It's because of something else."

"Maybe it was looking for another host," Joyce mumbled.

Queenie stood up suddenly. "Look, I love y'all, but I have schoolwork to finish. I'm going to head home. Call me if anything comes up."

Romeo nodded. He stood up and gave her a kiss on the cheek. "I'm going to stay. If I need to come home, I'll call you."

Queenie nodded before heading out to the car and back to their house.

Queenie sat behind the counter of the arcade boredly drawing circles on her leg.

Max came storming in. "Your dumbass boyfriend wants to see you."

Queenie glanced at Keith who wasn't paying attention. She slipped out the front door to see Billy leaning on the side of his still running car.

Queenie pulled him into a passionate kiss slipping her tongue through his lips.

Billy pulled away. "We need to talk."

Queenie nodded grimly.

"What was that yesterday?" He asked.

Queenie sighed. "I'm sorry. I didn't know it was a triggering situation."

"What does that mean?" He asked a slight edge in his voice.

Queenie looked down kicking a rock with her toe. "I-I was raped, Billy."

Billy's fist clenched.

"I didn't know that sex would trigger memories like that," she said.

"But you kept saying 'don't hurt Dom'," he said.

Queenie sighed. She glanced at the door of the arcade. "Come over tonight after my shift, and I'll explain everything."

Billy clenched his jaw but nodded.

Queenie gave him a kiss on the cheek before heading back inside. She headed towards the office to call her dad and check on Will.

She opened the door to see Lucas and Max in a serious conversation. "Whoa, what the hell, Lucas?"

"I'm telling her about last year," Lucas said.

Queenie glanced at Lucas before closing the door behind her. They began telling her everything about the Upside Down and the demogorgon.

"That is the most bullshit story I've ever heard," Max said when they finished.

"It's true," Lucas snapped.

"I have pictures," Queenie said. "I could show you them."

Max looked at her annoyed. "Please show me."

"They're at home," she said. "If you come with me-"

"If you haven't noticed your douche bag of a boyfriend will kill me if I'm not out to meet him soon," Max snapped.

"I'll get them and bring them back to you," Queenie grabbed her keys and clocked out before running to her car.

She pulled up into her driveway in a panic not noticing Steve pull up to the house across from her or Dustin leaving.

Queenie struggled with her keys.

"QUEENIE!" Dustin yelled making her drop her keys.

She looked over at the boy annoyed.

"You still have that sawed-off?" He asked.

Queenie nodded.

"Go get it then get in this car," Dustin said.

"Why?" Queenie asked.

"We have a situation," Dustin replied.

Queenie hurriedly put the keys into the lock and found her way over to the gun cabinet and grabbed her mom's sawed-off and bullets. She also grabbed a pistol and bullets.

Before she forgot, she ran upstairs and grabbed the pictures of the demogorgon. She grabbed a hair tie, wrote her father a note then ran out to Steve's car where she scrambled to the backseat.

"Dustin, what the hell did you do?" She asked.

"Why do you assume I did something?" Dustin asked in reply.

"Because you need our help," Queenie snapped. "And weapons."

"I swear," Steve mumbled the rest too low for Queenie to hear.

Queenie thought back on everything that happened that day and groaned in frustration. "This better not take too long because I was supposed to explain..." she swallowed. "Things to Billy."

Steve glanced at her in the rearview mirror. Dustin shot her a glare.

"Don't judge me!" Queenie hissed. "I was going to call Dad and check on Will but Lucas and Max distracted me. Then I came back home to get some pictures and now you two are dragging me along to do something which basically means I'll miss meeting up with my boyfriend."

"Oh! I'm sorry. I didn't realize that your love life was more important than the fate of the world," Dustin snapped.

"It's not!" Queenie complained. "It's just that I'm 18, and I shouldn't have to be saving the world or anything! I shouldn't have to be worried that my dad is okay while at a friend's. I shouldn't have to worry that my favorite kids are going to be safe. I shouldn't have to worry about my boyfriend or best friend or anyone in this town being unsafe!" Queenie let out a shaky breath. "I'm too worried to continue this."

"Queen," Steve said meeting her eyes in the rearview mirror. "Should I make you espresso?"

"Yes, please, Stevie," she said.

Dustin looked between the two confused. He didn't know that Queenie and Steve were so close. He thought their friendship only existed because they both were friends with Nancy.

"So," Steve mumbled. "Espresso and bat?"

15. Chapter 6: The Spy

They sat in silence in Steve's car. Queenie was sipping on coffee in a mug from Steve's place. Everything was slightly awkward when Steve spoke up.

"Wait a sec," Steve said glaring at Dustin. "How big?"

"First, it was like that," Dustin said showing the size with one hand. "Now, he's like this." Dustin showed a larger size with both hands.

Steve scoffed. "I swear to god, man, it's just some little lizard, okay?"

"It's not a lizard," Dustin argued.

"How do you know?" Steve asked.

"How do I know if it's not?" Dustin snapped.

"How do you know it's not just a lizard?" Steve shouted annoyed.

"Because his face opened up, and he ate my cat." Dustin said.

Queenie choked on her coffee, sputtering, coughing and spitting it out.

"Jesus Christ, Queenie!" Steve exclaimed looking back at her.

Queenie wiped the coffee of the headrest of Steve's seat. "Sorry." She smiled sheepishly before turning to Dustin. "Why didn't you come to me sooner!?"

"Because you were too busy sucking face with some guy apparently," Dustin snapped.

"I would've ditched Billy in a heartbeat to help you, Dust," Queenie replied quietly.

"Would've you?" Dustin asked looking back accusingly.

Queenie bit her lip but nodded. "You kids always come first."

Steve pulled into Dustin's driveway and put in park. Queenie downed the rest of her coffee. They grabbed the weapons and flashlights to fight this thing. Dustin led them to the storm shelter.

"I don't hear shit," Steve said.

"He's in there," Dustin said shaking his head.

Steve looked back at Dustin then tapped the door with his bat. Then he turned to Dustin. "Kid, I swear if this some kind of Halloween prank, you're dead."

"Why would Dusty prank me?" Queenie asked.

"Because you've been acting like a teenager and hanging out with people your own age," Steve said.

"That's no reason to prank me," Queenie exclaimed.

"Yeah," Steve complained. "It is."

"It's not a prank," Dustin said effectively ceasing their argument.

Steve continued to glare at him in disbelief.

"Oh my god," Queenie mumbled shoving Steve out of the way. "Keys." Dustin tossed her the keys, and she began to fiddle with the lock trying to unlock it.

"Hey!" Steve yelled pulling her away from the door. "Hey! If you get hurt, Romeo is going to kill me, and I don't want to be killed by Romeo Calabrese. So just..." He sighed rubbing his eyes tiredly. "Just stay behind me, okay?"

"Steve," Queenie complained. "I can take care of myself." She held up the sawed-off then reached behind her and pulled out the pistol she brought. She handed it to Steve. "For extra protection."

Steve took it cautiously and pocketed it. "Keys." Queenie handed him the keys, and he bent down and opened it. They didn't see anything initially. Steve took the flashlight from Dustin shining it around the cellar.

"He must be further down there," Dustin said, fear creeping its way into his voice. "I'll stay up here in case he tries to escape."

"Better idea," Queenie said giving Dustin a stern glare. "You lock us in because you have no way to protect yourself, and that way I don't have to worry about another one of you kids getting hurt."

"Lock you in with a demogorgon?" Dustin exclaimed.

"Dust, we'll be fine," Queenie said. "Now do it."

Dustin nodded.

Steve walked down first shining the flashlight around to try to get a glimpse of the creature. Queenie followed close behind eyes darting from corner to corner.

At the bottom of the stairs, Steve turned on the light then noticed something on the ground that he picked up with his bat.

"He shed his skin," Queenie mumbled. "Which means he's gotten bigger."

Steve looked over noticing something. "It dug out."

Queenie glanced over to see the hole in the wall.

"Steve! Queenie!" Dustin called through the cellar door. "What's going on down there?"

Steve opened the door of the cellar. "Get down here."

Dustin followed Steve back down the stairs. When he saw the shed skin, he said. "Oh, shit." Steve pointed to the hole in the wall that Queenie was inspecting. "Oh, shit!" Steve and Dustin walked over to the hole inspecting it with Queenie. "No way." Steve shone the light around as Dustin whispered again. "No way."

"Get some sleep, Dust," Queenie ordered. "Steve and I'll get supplies and meet you first thing in the morning."

"How am I supposed to sleep with a baby demogorgon loose?" Dustin exclaimed.

"Figure it out," Steve said closing his trunk.

"Look, I'm gonna call my dad and Joyce. Hopefully everything's okay with Will." Queenie continued. "Until, Steve and I get back, I don't want you going after this thing alone. If you got hurt..." She sighed hugging the boy. "I don't know what I'd do." She moved some hair out of his face and kissed his forehead. "Please, Dusty."

Dustin nodded before smirking mischievously. "Just don't take any detours for that new boyfriend of yours."

Queenie groaned. "I don't even want to think about Billy right now. He's gonna kill me for not talking to him."

"He's gonna kill you for being out with me," Steve mumbled.

Queenie nodded and opened Steve's passenger door. She slipped in. "I'll make it up to him."

Steve rolled his eyes before shutting his door and starting up the car. "I-"

"Steve," Queenie interrupted. "We haven't had sex yet."

"What? Bu-"

"It triggers my PTSD," she said. "At least, the way we've tried having sex. I was going to talk to him about it tonight. And we're not really dating." She sighed. "At least, not yet."

"Queen," Steve bit his lip glancing at the blue-haired girl in his passenger seat. "Do you want to go talk to him? I can handle the demogorgon with Dustin."

Queenie shook her head. "I'll explain to him that it was an emergency. Besides I don't really want to face his anger right now. The demogorgon is enough."

Steve snickered. "Maybe just don't tell him I was here too."

Queenie laughed. "Yeah, I'm most definitely not telling him that you were with Dust and I."

Steve pulled up to the grocery store. They got out of the car and found their way to the meat department. They picked up a few packages and buckets before heading back out to Steve's car.

"Hey, can I stay at your place tonight?" Queenie asked. "Dad's been at the Byers since yesterday and if Billy's there I-"

"Yeah, Queen, of course," Steve said.

"Thanks, Stevie," she said smiling at her friend.

The next morning, after a sleepless night. They stacked buckets of raw meat into Steve's car, and went to pick up Dustin. They drove out near the railroad tracks and began grabbing everything out of Steve's car.

Dustin stepped away from the two talking into his headset.

Queenie loaded her sawed-off before slipping on the rubber gloves they had picked up.

"All right," Steve closed his trunk. "Let's go."

"Just be there, stat. Over and out!" Dustin exclaimed into the mic.

"Who was that?" Queenie asked as she pushed Dustin in front of her but behind Steve.

"Lucas," Dustin said. "He finally answered my code red."

Queenie nodded throwing down the first piece of meat onto the train tracks.

"All right, so let me get this straight," Steve said.

Queenie snickered to herself. She doesn't get anything straight. She

was now leading the three of them with Dustin in the middle and Steve at the rear.

"You kept something you knew was probably dangerous in order to impress a girl who... who you just met?" Steve continued.

"All right, that's grossly oversimplifying things," Dustin complained.

"Doesn't sound like he's simplifying things," Queenie snapped.

"I mean why would a girl like some nasty slug anyway?" Steve asked.

"He's got a point, Dust," Queenie said.

"An interdimensional slug," he corrected. "And it's awesome."

"Well, even if she thought it was cool, which she didn't, I... I just... I don't know I just feel like you're trying way too hard, man." Steve said.

"Well, not everyone can have your perfect hair, alright?" Dustin mumbled.

"It's not about the hair, man," Steve complained. "The key with girls is just acting like you don't care."

Queenie scoffed rolling her eyes.

"Even if you do," Dustin said.

"Yeah, exactly," Steve said. "It drives them nuts."

"Then what?" Dustin asked.

"You just wait until, uh..." Steve tossed another piece of meat back. "Until you feel it."

"Feel what?" Dustin asked.

"It's like before it's gonna storm, you know?" Steve explained. "You can't see it, but you can feel it, like this, uh... electricity, you know?"

"Oh, like in the electromagnetic field when the clouds in the

atmosphere-

"No, no, no, no, no," Steve said. "Like a... like a sexual electricity."

"Oh," Dustin said.

Queenie snickered. "That's terrible advice."

"You got better?" Steve asked.

"Yeah," She turned to Dustin. "The trick with girl's is to act like you care about what she wants."

"Huh?" Dustin asked.

"What she wants," Queenie explained. "Like every girl wants a certain type of relationship or something out of a relationship. You have to find out what that is."

Steve nodded in agreement. "Yes."

"But, Dust," Queenie stopped walking and put a hand on his shoulder. "You're a kid; stop worrying about romantic relationships. Just be yourself, and someone great will come to you."

"That's easy to say if you're you," Dustin snapped.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Queenie asked.

"Queenie, you've got a cute accent. You can speak another language. And..." He paused, glancing at Steve before gesturing the curves of her body with his hand. "Look at you."

Queenie smiled awkwardly a blush rising to her cheeks. "I think that's the first time anyone's called my southern accent cute."

"You don't pay attention do you, Queen?" Steve asked snickering. "Everyone calls your accent sexy. Do you know how many guys in this town would date you if you weren't out?"

Queenie's eyes widened in surprise. She shook her head.

"They don't want to be labeled as have dated the queer, but they all

want to sleep with you," he said.

Queenie's mouth dropped open in shock. "I did not know that Steven."

Steve snickered. "Clearly." He turned back to Dustin. "Anyways, some girls want you to be aggressive, you know? Strong. Hot and heavy. Like a... like a lion."

Dustin nodded in understanding.

"But others you gotta be slow," Steve continued. "You gotta be stealthy. Like a... like a ninja."

"What type is Nancy?" Dustin asked.

"Nancy's different," Steve said. "She's different than the other girls."

Queenie snorted. "No, she's not. Nance is most definitely one you have to be a ninja with."

Steve shot her a glare as Dustin asked. "Well, what about you? What type of girl are you?"

Queenie shrugged. "That depends on what type of relationship it is. With Barb, I was the hopeless gay who couldn't get anything out around her. With Jonathan, he was ninja like, but I wanted him to be a lion at times. So that's where Billy comes in. He's my lion, but it's only temporary. I think for long term I'd want a ninja... I want my lifetime partner to be my best friend as well as my lover."

"That's sweet," Dustin said. "Does that make you special from other girls?"

"No," Queenie replied. "I'm a queer. We think differently than you straights." She turned from the boys walking further down the tracks. "We have to be best friends because if we aren't your people will kill us on sight. As the government said, we have no fundamental right to exist."

"Well, I mean," Dustin sighed. "This girl's special there's just something about her."

"Whoa, whoa, whoa. Hey, hey, hey." Steve stopped Dustin from walking. His protests caused Queenie to stop her mumblings about the "stupid government" and turn back to the two boys.

"What?" Dustin asked.

"You're not falling in love with this girl, are you?" Steve asked.

"Uh, no," Dustin said shakily then firmer. "No."

"Okay, good," Steve said. "Don't."

"I won't," Dustin promised.

"She's only gonna break your heart, and you're way too young for that shit," Steve said.

"Love, like real romantic love, isn't worth it, Dust, especially not at your age," Queenie said agreeing with Steve.

They continued walking down the train tracks in silence before Steve broke it. "Fabergé."

"What?" Dustin asked.

Steve pointed to his hair. "It's Fabergé Organics. Use the shampoo and conditioner and when your hair's damp..." He turned to Dustin stopping him again. "It's not wet, okay? When it's damp..."

"Damp," Dustin repeated.

"You do four puffs of the Farrah Fawcett spray," Steve continued.

"Farrah Fawcett spray?" Dustin asked laughing.

"Yeah, Farrah Fawcett," Steve confirmed turning to Dustin. "You tell anyone I just told you that and your ass is grass. You're dead, Henderson. You understand?"

"Yup," Dustin nodded.

"You too, Calabrese," Steve called looking over to his snickering blue-haired friend.

She put a hand over her heart. "I won't tell anyone, Harrington. Scout's honor."

Dustin looked at her expectantly.

"What?" She asked. "I use color protection products on my hair. Besides..." She snickered. "No matter what advice I give you, I don't think you can get," she gestured with her hands as Dustin had done earlier. "This body." She turned from them throwing down a chunk of meat before saying over her shoulder. "I can teach you Italian though."

They continued walking throwing down meat as the boys continued talking to each other.

"Oh yeah," Steve said looking around at the junkyard. "Yeah, this'll do." He took off his sunglasses. "This will do just fine. Good call, dude."

Steve and Queenie laid out the rest of the meat.

"I said medium-well," Lucas yelled causing the three of them to look up.

Queenie smiled seeing Lucas and Max standing not too far away from them. She walked over giving both the kids a quick hug.

"You know, Billy's pissed," Max said.

Queenie snickered. "When is he not?"

Max shrugged. "True." The girls both giggled.

"I'll talk to him, when all of this is over," Queenie said.

Max nodded.

Max and Queenie began helping Steve set up traps for the demogorgon, Dart, while Lucas and Dustin talked.

Max and Queenie were setting up a trigger trap using old sheets of metal when there was a loud clunk across the junkyard making

Queenie jump out of her skin. She looked over to see Steve with a chair in his hand yelling at Dustin and Lucas.

"Fuck you, Steve," she called over her shoulder. "You gave me a heart attack."

Steve snickered and rolled his eyes.

They finished setting up the traps and made their way to the school bus. Steve trailed the gasoline, the final part of the plan.

When darkness fell, they sat waiting for the demogorgon to come. An eerie fog had settled over the land. Lucas was up top looking for it with his binoculars while the rest of them sat down below. Dustin was pacing. Steve sat flickering the lighter on and off. Queenie was picking dead skin off around her nails. And Max was sat with her arms crossed in a seat.

"So you really fought one of these things before?" Max asked looking at Steve and Queenie.

They shared a look before nodding.

"And you're, like, totally, 100% sure it wasn't a bear?" she asked.

"Shit. Don't be an idiot. Okay? It wasn't a bear." Dustin snapped. "Why are you even here if you don't believe us?"

"Dustin Henderson!" Queenie yelled. "Don't you yell at her like that, young man!"

Dustin turned to Queenie still angry. "Why is she even here!?"

Queenie glared at him standing up. She twisted his ear and brought it to her lips hissing. "I'll whoop your ass." She shoved him away before replying in a more joking tone. "Have you met her step brother?"

"You're dating my step brother," Max complained.

"Billy is her step brother?" Steve asked in disbelief.

"Look, Max, dating is a strong word," Queenie said. "More like I'm

making out with and fucking your step brother exclusively for an extended period of time."

Max and Dustin scrunched up their noses in disgust. "Can you not put it that way?"

Queenie opened her mouth before closing it not knowing how else to phrase it.

"Besides, my step brother's a grade a douchebag," Max complained. "What do you even see in him?"

"You really want to know?" Queenie asked. Max nodded. "He's got pretty eyes. And-"

"The point of being a stupid teenager and making shit decisions is to make shit decisions," Steve interrupted smiling at his friend. "Billy is a shit decision, but he makes for a great stupid teenage story."

Queenie smiled widely at Steve. "Thanks Stevie." She pointed to him.

Steve smiled pointing back. "I've got your back, Queen."

"So, if you're dating, I'm using the word dating, my stepbrother, what are you and Steve?" she asked.

"We're best friends," Queenie replied. "It's a recent development but a great decision."

"So, she had to off-set it with a shit decision," Steve said.

"I still have yet to off-set it with a shit decision," Queenie corrected.

Max rolled her eyes before walking up the ladder to join Lucas.

"That's good," Steve said looking at Dustin. "Just show her you don't care."

"I don't," Dustin said.

Steve winked at him making Queenie snort with laughter.

"Why are you winking, Steve?" Dustin asked annoyed. "Stop."

Steve went back to flicking the lighter on and off. Queenie sat down beside again this time messing with the sawed-off.

There was a sudden growling making them all rush to the window to see.

"You see him?" Dustin asked.

"No," Steve and Queenie replied.

"Lucas," Dustin yelled. "What's going on?"

"Hold on!" Lucas shouted.

"We can't see shit in this fog," Queenie mumbled.

"I've got eyes!" Lucas shouted. "Ten o'clock! Te-ten o'clock!"

"There," Steve pointed.

"What's he doing?" Dustin asked.

"I don't know," Steve replied.

"He's not taking the bait," Queenie said flashes of cutting her skin with Jonathan and Nancy coming back to her. "It's not fresh enough." Queenie cocked the sawed-off and stormed out of the bus to protests from the others for her to come back.

Queenie bit into her hand drawing blood. "Hey, fuckface!" She squeezed out some blood showing the red hand to it. "Come and get it!"

"Look, if Queenie dies, Romeo will kill me," Steve yelled. "And I'm not letting her die." With that he stormed out of the bus too.

Steve stepped out carefully making his way over to Queenie who had not yet been attacked by the demogorgon. "Hey, I've got your back."

"Good," she took a shot as it lunged toward her. It backed up hurt but not seriously. "Because I'm going to need it."

Steve whistled. "Come on, buddy."

The demogorgon turns from Queenie to Steve.

"Come on. Dinner time," he said. "Human tastes better than cat, I promise."

"STEVE!" Queenie yelled as another demogorgon jumps out of the fog at her.

"Little busy, Queen," he mumbled.

"We're surrounded Steve," Queenie said.

"ABORT! ABORT!" Dustin yelled from the doorway of the bus.

"Get back in that bus and keep the door shut!" Queenie shouted before taking another shot at one of the creatures. Steve suddenly shoved Queenie then dove out of the way as one dove at him. He batted it away before pulling out the pistol Queenie had given him and shooting at it.

"QUEENIE! WE HAVE TO GET BACK!" Steve yelled.

Queenie shot at another creature before meeting Steve's panicked eyes. They both nodded. Steve swung at the demogorgon that had been attacking Queenie allowing her to dive in then not soon after Steve dove in almost landing on Queenie.

They both put their weight against the door trying to stop the monsters that were tearing at the door. The kids were yelling but Queenie couldn't tell what they were saying because there was blood rushing through her ears. The demogorgons burst through the door making all of them scream and run further into the bus. Dustin tried the radio system again while Steve and Queenie beat back the monsters. Max looked up at the roof noticing banging coming from it. She screamed as one roared at her and Steve pushed her out of the way. He fired at it with the pistol then tossed it to the side when it ran out of bullets and let Queenie move in to shoot it with the sawed-off. With another screech, all of the monsters retreated.

Queenie picked up the revolver and reloaded it. Then reloaded the sawed-off as well before following Steve out the bus with the kids behind them.

"What happened?" Lucas asked.

"I don't know," Max said.

"They scared 'em off?" Dustin suggested.

"No," Steve replied. "No way. They're going somewhere."

"Where ever it is?" Queenie cocked the sawed-off. "We're gonna find out."

16. Chapter 8: The Mind Flayer

Billy hadn't realized how much he cared about Queenie until he couldn't find her. He truly thought she'd be just a fun fling, but when he went over to her house and saw both her father's and her cars there but no one answered and he began to worry about her safety he knew that it was more than a fling. After he didn't find her there today or at work, he was determined to go out and find her.

He was interrupted by a knocking at his door. "Billy?"

He sighed annoyed. "Yeah, I'm a little bit busy in here, Susan."

"Open the door," his father yelled. "Right now."

"What's wrong?" Billy asked facing Neil and Susan.

"Why don't you tell us?" Neil snapped.

"Because I don't know," Billy snapped.

"We can't find Maxine," Susan explained.

"And her window's open," Neil added. "Where is she?"

"I don't know," he mumbled.

"You don't know?" Neil scoffed.

"Look, I'm sure she just, I don't know, went to the arcade or something," Billy said stepping to his closet to get his jacket. "I'm sure she's fine."

Neil followed him anger rising. "You were supposed to watch her."

"I know, Dad, I was," Billy sighed putting on his jacket. "It's just you guys were three hours late, and, well, I have to go look for my girlfriend." He sighed, turning back to his dad. "I'm sorry, okay?"

"So, that's why you been staring at yourself in the mirror like some faggot, instead of watching your sister?" Neil asked.

"I have been looking after her all week, Dad. Okay?" Billy snapped. "She wants to run off then that's her problem, all right? She's 13 years old. She shouldn't need a full-time babysitter. And she's not my sister." He shut off his boombox.

Neil lunged at him, slamming him against the built-in shelf. "What did we talk about?" When Billy didn't answer, Neil punched him. "What did we... talk about?"

"Respect and responsibility," Billy said glaring at his father.

"That is right," Neil said. "Now, apologize to Susan."

"I'm sorry, Susan," Billy apologized.

"It's okay, Neil, really-"

"No, it's not okay," Neil interrupted yelling. "Nothing about his behavior is okay. But he's gonna make up for it." He turned to Susan. "He's gonna call that whore he's dating and tell her that he can't see her tonight. And then he's gonna go find his sister. Like the good, kind, respecting brother that he is." Neil turned back to Billy who had a bruise forming on his cheek. "Isn't that right, Billy?"

When Billy didn't answer Neil stepped closer yelling. "Isn't that right?"

"Yes sir," he said softly.

Neil sighed. "I'm sorry, I couldn't hear you."

"Yes sir," Billy said louder.

"Find Max," Neil said leaving Billy's room with Susan.

Billy threw down his bracelet in anger and shame, covering his face to stop the tears. After a few seconds of collecting himself, he stormed out of the house determined to find both Max and Queenie.

"You're positive that was Dart?" Lucas asked. He was walking beside

Max. Dustin and Steve were in front of them. Queenie was at the back keeping a silent watch on the woods around them while her mind wandered to Billy.

"Yes," Dustin said. "He had the same exact yellow pattern on his butt."

"He was tiny two days ago," Max snapped.

"Well, he's molted three times already," Dustin said.

"Malted?" Steve asked.

"Molted," Dustin corrected.

"Shed his skin, Steve, to grow." Queenie said still distracted.

"When's he gonna molt again?" Max asked.

"It's gotta be soon," Dustin replied. "When he does, he'll be fully grown or close to it. And so will his friends."

"Yeah, he's gonna eat a lot more than just a cat," Steve said.

"Wait," Lucas ran in front of Dustin stopping him causing Queenie to bump into the boy. "A cat? Dart ate a cat?"

"No, what?" Dustin said panicking. "No."

"What are you talking about? He ate Mews." Steve said.

"Yeah, remember, when you told us I choked on my coffee and got it all over the back of Steve's seat?" Queenie asked looking at the boy confused.

"GUYS!" Dustin yelled shutting the two older teenagers up.

"I knew it!" Lucas yelled. "You kept him!"

"No! No," Dustin denied. "No I... No I... He missed me. He wanted to come home."

"Bullshit," Lucas exclaimed.

"I didn't know he was a Demogorgon, okay?" Dustin protested.

"Oh, so now you admit it?" Lucas snapped.

"Guys, who cares?" Max said trying to stop their argument. "We have to go."

"I care! You put the party in jeopardy! You broke the rule of law!" Lucas yelled.

"So did you!" Dustin shouted.

"What?" Lucas asked.

"You told a stranger the truth!" Dustin argued.

Queenie rolled her eyes and took out the pistol. She shot up in the air getting everyone's attention. "Thank you. Now!" She put the pistol back in her pocket and turned to the two boys. "I've had enough of this 'party rules' shit! As the eldest member of the party, I declare that what you both did was against party rules, but because of ongoing combat party rules do not apply. Now, we're supposed to be fighting demogorgons, so stop yelling at each other before you give me a headache!"

Queenie scoffed stepping away from them and cursing in Italian.

"Queen," Steve said leading the girl towards a distant screeching. The kids scrambled to follow after them, Max protesting before following. They made it to a cliff that overlooked Hawkins.

"I don't see 'em," Dustin said.

Lucas looked through his binoculars. "It's the lab. They were going back home."

They began the trek to the lab. Steve led them while Dustin and Lucas walked side-by-side still steaming from their argument. Queenie and Max were at the back of the group talking in low voices.

"Weren't Neil and Susan supposed to get home today?" Queenie asked.

"Son of a bitch," Max mumbled. "Neil's gonna kill me. Well..." She looked up at Queenie.

"Neil's gonna kill Billy," Queenie said, "Who's going to kill you."

Max nodded grimly.

"Tell him it was me," Queenie said. "Tell Billy that I'm the reason you went missing. I'll take the blame."

"Queenie, I can't let you do that," Max protested.

"I'll be fine," she said. "I don't mean as much to him as you."

Max swallowed nervously before looking up at the older girl. "You know, he actually does care about you?"

"What?" Queenie asked her eyes widening in shock.

"I know I'm as surprised about it as you are," Max said. "But when he couldn't find you at home earlier today, he got really worried about you. He's tried calling your house multiple times, but he never got an answer."

"Oh my," Queenie mumbled. "I-I didn't know. I... I thought he didn't care about me. I thought it was a fling." Queenie smiled to herself. She was thankful for the darkness because then Max couldn't see her blush. "I think... I think I... I think I care about him too."

Max scoffed in disgust. "I'll never understand why, but..." She smiled taking Queenie's hand in good faith. "But maybe you'll be a good influence on him."

They spent the rest of the walk in silence finally coming to a clearing. As they stepped out they heard Nancy say "Steve?" as Jonathan said "Queenie?"

Steve and Queenie replied similarly saying at the same time "Nancy?" and "Jonathan?" respectively.

"What are you doing here?" Nancy asked.

"What are you doing here?" Steve asked.

"We're looking for Mike and Will," Nancy explained.

"They're not in there, are they?" Dustin asked.

"We're not sure," Nancy said.

"Why?" Jonathan asked as a demogorgon screeched in the direction of the building.

Queenie sighed pushing past the rest of them. "Does this gate work?"

"We haven't been able to-" Jonathan started to say before Queenie began shooting at the fence.

"What are you doing!?" Lucas asked panicking.

"Last I knew my dad was with Joyce and Will, if Will is in there so is my dad," Queenie explained. "I'm not losing my dad too."

"Okay, but you can't shoot through a fence," Steve said lowering her arms to her side.

"I won't know until I try," Queenie said.

"That's a stupid idea!" Max yelled.

"Stupid teenager, shit decisions, remember?" Queenie replied.

This launched an entire argument over what they should do. The argument was interrupted when Nancy said. "The power's back."

Jonathan ran over to the booth and hit the open button. It wasn't working.

Queenie sighed throwing her stuff down and going to the opening of the gate.

"What are you doing now?" Nancy asked.

Queenie ignored her hitting at the mechanism that locked the gate with the butt of her sawed-off. "Back off." Max and Lucas backed up

as she shot at it causing a ricochet.

"Queen, what are you doing?" Steve asked.

"There's always a manual override," Queenie mumbled looking up at him with a mischievous glint in her eyes. "Even if it's not built in." She checked the locking mechanism to see it had cracked open. She began manually moving the heavy gate. Grunting with effort, she called over her shoulder. "Stevie, a little help here." Steve sat his bat against the booth and joined Queenie helping her to pull the gate. They had got it to move a bit when it suddenly started opening itself.

Jonathan and Nancy drove his car through to pick everyone up and the rest of them waited by the gate. Jonathan's car whizzed by them barely avoiding them, and Hopper stopped telling them to get in. Steve and Queenie shoved all the kids in first before Steve shoved Queenie in before getting in last himself.

"Is my dad alive?" Queenie asked Hopper.

"Yes, Romeo's alive," Hopper replied.

Queenie began saying praises very quickly in Italian.

When they got to the Byers's, the first thing Queenie did was hug her dad. He looked worse for wear; he had blood staining parts of his hands and face. He had bruises forming, but all that mattered was that he was alive. They spoke to each other lowly in Italian while everyone else did their own things.

Hopper hung up the phone angrily turning to the rest of them. This ceased the Calabrese's conversation for now.

"They didn't believe you, did they?" asked Dustin.

"We'll see," Hopper mumbled turning to them.

" "We'll see"? We can't just sit here while those things are loose!" Mike exclaimed.

"We stay here, and we wait for help," Hopper ordered.

"We can't take all of those things alone," Queenie said putting a comforting hand on Mike's shoulder.

"We'd be dead by morning," Romeo agreed.

The kettle went off. Romeo and Queenie stepped into the kitchen making themselves both a cup of tea. "So, Papá, I have a new boyfriend, I guess."

Romeo raised his eyebrows taking a sip of his tea. "Who is it?"

"Do you remember Billy from the night of Tina's party?" She asked.

Romeo nodded.

"It's him," she replied. "But I don't think it'll last long."

"Is he why you know sex triggers PTSD?" Romeo asked.

Queenie nodded.

"Well," Romeo sat down his tea mug. "If you're sure about this relationship, you are an adult."

Queenie smiled hugging her dad. "Thanks, Papá." She handed her dad the pistol, and its ammunition before walking over to stand by Steve.

The kids were discussing Bob's sacrifice. "We can't let him die in vain."

"Well, what do you want to do, Mike?" Dustin asked. "The chief's right on this. We can't stop those Demo-dogs on our own."

"Demo-dogs?" Max asked.

We all looked at Dustin to explain.

"Demogorgon dogs," he said gesturing with his hands. "Demo-dog. It's like a compound. It's like a play on words"

"Okay," Max said getting him to stop.

Queenie offered a bit of her tea to Steve who declined.

"I mean when it was just Dart, maybe," Dustin continued.

"But there's an army now," Lucas said.

"Precisely," Dustin agreed.

"His army," Mike mumbled.

"What do you mean?" Steve asked.

"His army," Mike said louder. "Maybe if we stop him, we can stop his army, too."

Queenie smiled understanding what Mike was talking about. She handed her cup of tea to Steve and walked over to the table. "But, where would he even be? We can't stop the brain without knowing the location of it."

"Will knows," Mike mumbled. He grabbed a drawing of the Shadow Monster that Will has been seeing in his visions.

"The shadow monster?" Dustin asked.

"It got Will that day on the field," Mike explained. "The doctor said it was like a virus, it infected him."

"And so this virus, it's connecting him to the tunnels?" Max asked.

"To the tunnels, to the monsters, the Upside Down, everything," Mike said.

"Whoa," Steve said handing Queenie her tea. "Slow down. Slow down."

"Okay, so," Mike said slowing his speech a bit. "The shadow monster's inside everything. And if the vines feel something like pain, then so does Will."

"And so does Dart," Lucas added.

"Yeah," Mike agreed. "Like what Mr. Clarke taught us. The Hive Mind."

"Hive mind?" Steve asked.

"A collective consciousness," Dustin explained. "It's a super-organism."

"Like a bunch of people operating with one mind," Queenie explained further. "Like Mussolini's ideas became Italian ideals."

Steve nodded in understanding as Queenie took another sip of her tea.

"And this is the thing that controls everything," Mike said, pointing to the Shadow Monster. "It's the brain."

"Like the mind flayer," Dustin said.

Lucas snapped.

"The what?" Max asked as Steve asked "What?"

Queenie snickered taking Steve's arm. "Come on, you two, we'll make nerds of you yet."

The boys dug out Will's Dungeons and Dragons manual to show the others. "The Mind Flayer?"

"What the hell is that?" Hopper asked.

"It's a monster from an unknown dimension," Dustin explained. "It's so ancient. That it doesn't even know it's true home. Okay, it enslaves races of other dimensions by taking over their brains using its highly-developed psionic powers."

"Oh my god," Hopper complained, "None of this is real. This is a kids' game."

"No, it's a manual," Dustin argued. "And it's not for kids. And unless you know something we don't, this is the best metaphor-"

"Analogy," Lucas interrupted.

"Analogy? That's what you're worried about?" Dustin snapped.

Queenie slammed her now empty cup down on the table. "I've had

about enough of your bickering tonight boys! So either you both better straighten up or I swear..."

Dustin and Lucas shared a wide-eyed look terrified of the unfinished threat.

"So the Mind Flayer wants to conquer us, basically," Dustin continued. "It believes it's the master race."

At the words "master race", Romeo tensed up remembering propaganda from his childhood about Italians being the master race. He mumbled an old "adage" burned into his brain mindlessly.

"Oh, like the uh Germans?" Steve offered.

"Uh, the Nazis?" Dustin corrected.

At the word "nazis", Romeo lost his grip on the table stumbling backwards. Queenie stepped away from the table looking at her father worriedly. Romeo was mumbling in German. He seemed to be begging.

"Papá?" Queenie tried carefully.

Romeo continued to mumble in German not noticing his daughter looking at him worriedly.

"Papá," Queenie tried again this time taking his hand in hers. "Papá!"

Romeo continued to mumble "Ich bin loyal."

Queenie bent down to look into his fearful, brown eyes. She began speaking to him slowly in Italian. Slowly the fear and far-away look in his eyes began to fade. Romeo seemed to jolt back to reality before locking eyes with his daughter.

Queenie helped her father up and led him back to the table which he grabbed onto for support. Everyone looked at him with concern. He gave them a pained smile. "I'm fine. I suffered less at their hands than many others."

They continued to discuss the Mind Flayer, and its abilities while

Queenie watched her father with concerned eyes.

"They're right," Joyce said breaking Queenie out of her thoughts about her father. "We have to kill it. I want to kill it."

"Me too," Hopper said drowning out her from speaking again. "Me too, Joyce. But how do we do that? We don't exactly know what we're dealing with here."

"No," Mike said. "But he does. If anyone knows how to destroy this thing, it's Will. He's connected to it. He'll know its weakness."

"I thought we couldn't trust him anymore," Max said. "That he's a spy for the Mind Flayer now."

"Yeah, but he can't spy if he doesn't know where he is," Mike suggested.

Everyone started preparing different things to interrogate Will. Queenie thought this was the perfect time to talk to Jonathan. "Hey." She sat down beside him.

"Hey," he replied shortly.

"I know, this is like the worst time, but..." She sighed. "I know you love Nancy, and if you had the choice between the two of us, you'd choose Nancy every time. So... I... I love you Jon, but I won't be anyone's second choice. Please don't take it personally."

"Que," he sighed taking her in a hug. "I'm sorry. I... I'm just sorry for it all. I love you too... just not that way."

Queenie nodded in understanding. She pushed him slightly with her shoulder. "You're still my friend Jon even if ditching your family to run off with Nancy was a total douche move."

Jonathan sighed. "I know, you don't have to lecture me."

"I'm not going to," Queenie said. "Just know I think it was a really shitty thing to do."

Jonathan sighed. He didn't meet her eyes.

Queenie, feeling anger both over what Jon had done and his refusal to look at her, snapped in that moment. "And in case you were wondering, I do have a boyfriend now. He's Billy Hargrove, and I wouldn't suggest angering him like you've angered me."

Queenie stood up quickly turned on a dime and went to help her father.

Joyce, Jonathan, Mike, and Hopper went out to the shed to interrogate Will. The rest of them waited in the house. Dustin was pacing. Nancy leaned up against the wall worried. Romeo and Queenie sat talking lowly in Italian again. Steve was practicing with the bat. And Max and Lucas sat in the hall talking.

After a long time, Hopper rushed in grabbing a pen and paper. "What happened?"

Hopper sighed. "I think he's talking, just not with words."

"What is that?" Steve asked.

"Morse code," the kids answered.

"H-E-R-E," Hopper said writing it out.

"Here," everyone said together.

"Will's still in there," Hopper said. "He's talking to us."

Joyce, Jonathan, Mike, and Hopper went back out to talk to Will and relayed the morse code back to us in the house to decipher. By the end of it they had the message: CLOSE GATE.

"Close gate," they all said together.

The phone began ringing.

"Shit. Shit." Dustin yelled grabbing it and slamming it back into place. It began to ring again. This time, Nancy grabs it and throws it.

"Do you think he heard that?" Max asked.

"It's just a phone," Steve said. "It could be anywhere. Right?"

"Will would know what his home phone sounds like," Queenie mumbled worriedly.

The kids all rushed to the windows. Romeo cocked the pistol as Queenie did the same with the sawed-off. Hopper came in with a shotgun of his own. "Hey, hey get away from the windows." The kids all ran back.

Hopper turned to Jonathan. "Do you know how to use this?"

"What?" He asked.

"Can you use this?" Hopper asked.

"I can," Nancy said. Hopper tossed her the gun. They all lined up ready to fight.

"Where are they?" Max asked.

There was a loud sound to their right causing all of them to turn towards it.

"What are they doing?" Nancy asked.

There was another loud sound to their right again causing them to turn towards the front of the house again. Suddenly a dead Demo-dog crashed through the front window.

"Holy shit," Dustin mumbled.

"Is it dead?" Max asked.

Hopper poked it with his boot. The front door creaked then unlocked itself everyone aimed at it. The door opened and Elle stepped in. The crescent moon shaped necklaces shining on her neck making Queenie reach for the sun shaped one around her neck. Elle and Mike stared at each other smiles slowly making their way on to their faces.

17. Chapter 9: The Gate

"Eleven," Mike whispered.

"Mike," She gasped, and they pulled themselves into a hug. Eleven let few tears fall.

"Is that-" Max asked and Dustin and Lucas nodded.

"I never gave up on you," Mike said smiling at her. "I called you every night. Every night for-"

"353 days," Elle finished interrupting him. "I heard."

"Why didn't you tell me you were there?" Mike asked his smile falling. "That you were okay?"

"Because I wouldn't let her," Hopper interrupted. He stepped closer to Elle. "What the hell is this? Where have you been?"

"Where have you been?" Elle asked.

Hopper pulled her into a hug.

"You've been hiding her," Mike said. "You've been hiding her this whole time." Mike shoved Hopper.

"Hey!" Hopper snapped. "Let's talk. Alone." Hopper dragged Mike further into the house to a bedroom.

Queenie took this moment to walk over to Elle. "Hey," she hugged the girl who smiled upon seeing her. "How's my Dianna?"

Elle looked at her confused. "Dianna?"

Queenie pointed to Elle's moon shaped necklace then lifted the sun one she wore. "You're Dianna, and I'm Apollo. They were the twin gods of the moon and sun."

Elle smiled. "You're hair," she lifted a blue lock. "It's changed."

Queenie chuckled. "Yeah, it has." Queenie wiped a tear from her eye. "I've missed you, sweetie."

Elle smiled wiping a tear of her own. "I've missed you too."

Queenie stepped back letting Dustin and Lucas rush forward to talk to her. She watched her from a distance. When Max tried to introduce herself Elle brushed it off moving away from them. Queenie glared at the young girl and stormed over to her. "You will not do that!" She forcibly turned Elle around. "Max is not trying to take your place! Be nice, Elle!"

"Queen," Steve said getting the girl's attention. "When was the last time you smoked?"

"It's been a few days," she admitted. "I'm having nicotine withdrawals, and it's making me irritable."

"Go have a smoke," Steve said shoving her away from the children. "I've got this."

Queenie groaned in frustration but stepped into Joyce's room and lit up a cigarette. She relished in the smoke as the others talked about closing the gate.

Romeo and Queenie stood towards the back as Hopper talked about the gate. "It's not like it was before. It's grown. A lot. And, I mean, that's considering we can get in there. The place is crawling with those dogs."

"Demo-dogs," Dustin corrected.

"I'm sorry, what?" Hopper sighed.

"I said, uh, demo-dogs," Dustin replied. "Like Demogorgon and dogs. You put 'em together. And it sounds pre-"

"Dust," Queenie mumbled putting a hand on his shoulder. "Give it a rest."

"I can do it," Elle said.

"You're not hearing me," Hopper said.

"I'm hearing you," Elle reassured. "I can do it."

"Even if Elle can there's still another problem," Mike said. "If the brain dies, the body does."

"I thought that was the whole point," Max said.

"It is," Mike said. "But if we're really right about this... I mean, if Elle closes the gate and kills the Mind Flayer's army..."

"Will's a part of the army," Lucas mumbled.

"If Elle closes the gate, Will dies," Mike finished.

Queenie looked at them. "No! I'm not letting another person I care about die. Not again. Never again." Queenie sighed. "I've already failed three people; I'm not gonna fail a fourth."

Romeo put a hand on her arm and whispered in Italian. "You didn't fail anyone."

Queenie looked at him with tears in her eyes mumbling back in Italian. "But I did Dad."

They all followed Joyce and Jonathan into Will's room where he laid in a fitful sleep.

"He likes it cold," Joyce said.

"What?" Hopper asked.

"It's what Will kept saying to me," she mumbled. "He likes it cold." She shuts the window. "We keep giving it what it wants."

"If this is a virus," Nancy said, "And Will is a host, then..."

"Then we need to make the host uninhabitable," Jonathan continued.

"So if he likes it cold..." Nancy continued.

"We need to burn it out of him," Joyce said.

"We have to do it somewhere he doesn't know this time," Mike said.

"Yeah," Dustin agreed, "Somewhere far away."

Hopper began giving Joyce and Jonathan directions to a cabin he and Elle had been staying at. They loaded Will into Jonathan's car. Romeo was talking to Joyce about something.

Queenie approached her father carefully. She could tell that her father wanted to go with them to keep Will safe. "Papà, go with them. I'll stay safe." Romeo nodded hugging her.

"Keep the kids safe," he mumbled.

Queenie nodded. "Steve and I've got this."

Romeo smiled at her before saying in Italian. "I love you, Princess."

Queenie smiled replying in Italian. "I love you, Daddy."

The six of them watched the others drive away before Steve and Queenie ushered the children back inside.

Dustin cleaned everything out of the fridge. "All right," he sighed. "It should fit now."

Steve was holding the demo-dog wrapped in a blanket. "Is this really necessary?"

"Yes, it is, okay? This is a ground-breaking scientific discovery," Dustin said.

Queenie chuckled shaking her head. "If you're ground-breaking scientific discovery breaks Joyce's fridge, you're helping me fix it." She walked away from the two boys towards Max. "Hey," she put a hand on Max's shoulder. "You doing okay?"

"Yeah," Max mumbled not meeting her eyes.

"Sorry about Elle's rudeness," Queenie said.

"Que, I don't mind," Max said.

"Bullshit," Queenie snapped.

"Que!" Max protested. "I'll be fine!"

"Fine," Queenie mumbled. "But if you need someone to talk to, I'm here." Queenie turned around to notice Lucas. "Can y'all clean up this glass?"

Max and Lucas nodded grabbing the broom and dustpan while Queenie sat down in frustration. Mike was pacing a few feet away.

"Mike, would you stop already?" Lucas snapped.

"You weren't in there, okay, Lucas?" Mike snapped back causing Queenie to groan in frustration. She was really tired of this arguing. "That lab is swarming with hundreds of those dogs."

"Demo-dogs," Dustin called from the kitchen.

Mike shot him a glare while Lucas said. "The chief will take care of her."

"Like she needs protection," Max said.

"Listen, dude," Steve said coming into the room. "A coach calls a play in a game, bottom line, you execute it. All right?"

"Okay, first of all," Mike snapped. "This isn't some stupid sports game. And second, we're not even in the game. We're on the bench."

Steve began to stammer out an answer before Queenie stood up angrily. "First of all, I've had just about enough of your attitude, so step back before I beat your ass." Queenie towered over the boy. "And second, Hopper told us to stay here, and I don't know about you, but I'm not risking my life when I don't have to."

"But, everyone else is risking their lives," Mike protested.

Queenie clapped in his face startling Mike. "What did I say about that attitude!?" She leaned closer. "You're gonna show us," she gestured to herself and Steve, "Some respect young man." Queenie sighed backing away from him and rubbing her eyes frustratingly. "We're not gonna do anything because they don't need us to."

"What if they did?" Dustin asked getting everyone's attention. "I mean, those Demo-dogs, they have a hive mind. When they ran away from the bus, they were called away."

"So, if we get there attention..." Luca said.

"Maybe we can draw them from the lab," Max said catching on to their plan.

"And clear a path to the gate," Mike finished.

"Yeah, and then we all die," Steve said.

Queenie nodded in agreement. "I'm not letting any of you die just like I wouldn't let Will die."

"That's one point of view," Dustin mumbled.

"It's not a point of view, man," Steve argued. "That's a fact."

Mike walked past them. "I got it!" He pointed to tunnel on the wall. "This is where the chief dug his hole. This is our way into the tunnels. So..." He ran to a different part of the house and different drawing of tunnels. "Here, right here. This is like a hub. So, you got all the tunnels feeding in here. Maybe if we set this on fire..."

"Oh yeah? That's a no," Steve said looking at Queenie for support. She nodded in agreement.

"The Mind Flayer would call away his army," Dustin said.

"They'd all come to stop us," Lucas added.

"Hey," Queenie protested, but they didn't hear her.

"We circle back to the exit," Mike replied.

"Guys," Steve yelled getting ignored as well.

"By the time they realize we are gone-"

"Elle would be at the gate," Max finished.

"Hey. Hey! Hey!" Steve clapped finally getting the kids attention.
"This is not happening."

"But-" Mike began to protest.

"No, no, no, no, no," Steve snapped. "No buts. We promised we'd keep you shitheads safe, and that's exactly what we plan on doing. We're staying here. On the bench. And we're waiting for the starting team to do their job. Does everybody understand?"

The kids rolled their eyes and Mike protested. "This isn't a stupid sports game."

"WHAT DID I TELL YOU ABOUT THAT ATTITUDE!?" Queenie yelled crossing her arms. "Now, Steve gave you kids an order, an order that'll keep you alive. Do you understand the difference between being alive or dead? So either y'all start listening to him, or I'm gonna be pissed, and y'all don't wanna see that."

An engine revving outside ended the conversation. Max and Lucas went to the window to see Billy's car. Queenie groaned opening the sawed-off. "Oh, we are not doing this right now, Billy!" She reloaded the sawed-off. "You can wait, honey! I've got bigger problems than you right now!" Queenie held the sawed-off shotgun up in the air and stormed towards the door.

"Whoa, whoa," Steve grabbed Queenie's arm and pulled her back.
"Queenie put the gun down!"

"Look! Steve, we've got bigger problems right now, and if he wants a fight," she smirked before yelling towards the door. "Then let's go, darling! Let's settle it right now!"

"You know," Max said getting Queenie and Steve's attention. "You and my brother might work out. I thought you were too nice, but if you settle fights with a shotgun, you might last."

"Look, Max," Queenie said finally starting to calm down. "I'm only doing this because we both know he's here for you. We know Neil came home kicked his ass because you were gone and now he's gonna kick your ass because that's how it works. And I'm not letting that happen." She jerked her arm out of Steve's grip. "I'm not gonna shoot your brother. I might shoot his car but never him."

Steve sighed. "Queen, stay here. Protect the kids. I'll get rid of him."

Queenie sighed her anger slowly fading. She nodded. "Okay. I'm sorry..."

Steve patted her back before heading out the front door.

Queenie was too busy watching what was going on outside to even notice the kids lining up at the window to watch.

"Shit," Dustin said as they all sat down turning from the window. "Did he see us?"

"He saw y'all," Queenie said. "Get to the kitchen."

The kids ran through the house as Billy slammed the door open coming face to face with Queenie. He smirked. "And I find you here with Harrington, too."

"Billy," she cocked the sawed-off. "It's not what you think."

"Oh really?" he asked taking a threatening step towards her. "Then what is it? Because you've been missing from your house for days, and, well..." he snickered. "I've been worried about you."

Queenie sighed lowering the gun a bit. "I'll explain everything... tomorrow."

"No, no, no," Billy shook his head pulling the sawed-off out of her hands and tossing it aside. "You don't get any of this tomorrow shit. Explain now." Billy grabbed her by her collar.

"Dustin lost his cat," Queenie said wincing away from his anger. "And he made me look for it. We needed help, so Dustin called Lucas and Max and I called Steve. Max wanted to go home, but I wouldn't let

her. It's my fault."

Billy dropped her collar. He snickered. "See, that doesn't sound right, babe. Because you've been missing for two days and your truck hasn't moved. So you wanna try that again?"

Queenie swallowed in fear then decided to use a different tactic. "You know, you look really hot when you're angry." She dove forward capturing his lips in a passionate kiss which he returned.

Billy moved his hands to cup her face then in a flash he slammed her against the wall breaking their kiss. "Now, now," he chuckled darkly. Queenie gasped for air. "As fun as that was. Let's try this again. You want to tell me the truth?"

Queenie's vision began to go black. "I... I can't," she breathed causing Billy to slam her head against the wall again. "I... I..." she took a deep breath. "Kidnapped." At this word, Billy lost his grip on her backing away in shock.

Steve turned him and punched him in the face. Queenie dropped to the floor catching her breath. She was losing her grip on where she was and what was going on. Two masses were fighting again. This time the darker-haired mass seemed to be winning at least at first. When the tables turned, Queenie completely lost grip of where she was. She just didn't want him to hurt Dom.

"Queenie," someone said echoing in her mind. "Queenie!"

She shook her head noticing someone in front of her.

"Queenie," the person said. "It's me, Max."

"Max?" Queenie peered up at her, the red-headed girl coming into focus.

"Yeah," she held up Billy's keys. "Do you think you could drive us?"

Queenie held her head getting rid of the rest of the foginess. "Yeah."

"Good," she handed her the keys then helped her up. "Let's go."

The boys carried Steve out to the backseat. Queenie got in the driver's seat and tore away from the Byers's. Lucas was giving her directions to the place Hopper had entered the tunnels.

"Nancy?" Steve asked waking up.

Mike gave him a confused look.

Steve groaned and went to wipe his face.

"No, don't touch it," Dustin said taking his hand away from his face. "Hey buddy... shhhh shhhh. It's okay; you put up a good fight. He kicked your ass, but you put up a good fight, buddy, okay. You're okay?"

Steve groaned in pain.

"Sleeping beauty awake back there?" Queenie asked from the driver's seat. Her head was still pounding from getting slammed against a wall, but she was much better than Steve.

"Okay," Lucas said looking at the map. "You're gonna keep straight for half a mile, then make a left on Mount Sinai."

Queenie nodded in understanding.

"What's going on?" Steve asked making Max, who sat between Lucas and Queenie not really in a seat, look back at him. "Oh my god." He sat up slightly.

"Steve," Dustin said. "Just relax."

"Oh my god!" Steve exclaimed.

"They were gonna leave you behind," Dustin said.

"Oh my god," Steve exclaimed again.

"I promised that you'd be cool, okay?" Dustin shouted.

"Y'all need to shut up!" Queenie yelled. "Steve don't puke on my boyfriend's seats, he'll kill us all. Everyone else be quiet. I don't like

driving already, and now I'm having to do it in the dark with a pounding headache." Queenie slammed on the gas.

"Slow down!" Steve yelled followed by the kids arguing. "Stop the car!"

"Whoa, that's Mount Sinai!" Lucas yelled.

"Make a left," Max shouted.

Queenie nodded doing just that, taking the turn slightly too sharp.

They dropped down into the tunnels with Steve leading and Queenie at the back. Steve led them to the epicenter. The ground was squishy and that disgusted Queenie.

"God," Lucas said.

"What is this place?" Max asked.

"Guys, come on," Steve said walking further into the tunnels. "Keep moving." For someone who got beat until he passed out, he was doing really well keeping his cool.

Dustin stopped making Queenie stop. "What's up, Dust?"

He looked up. "What the hell?"

Queenie looked up as well to see some pulsing thing. "Dusty! Back up!" She tried to pull him out of the way as it spit something out at them.

"Shit!" Dustin screamed fell back.

Queenie cursed in Italian dusting the stuff off her face.

"Help! Help!" Dustin yelled scrambling to his feet and pulling Queenie up with him.

"Dustin," Mike said as the others came back.

The kids and Steve gathered around a panicking Dustin ignoring Queenie who was gagging because some of whatever was spit at them got in her mouth.

"What happened? What happened?" Steve asked.

"It's in my mouth!" Dustin screamed. "Some got on my mouth! Shit!" He gagged and coughed.

Queenie cleaned off her tongue with her hand making a face before replacing the bandana acting as a mask. "Whatever it is," she said calmly. "It doesn't taste pleasant." She crawled over to Dustin rubbing his back. "You okay, Dusty?"

"I'm okay," he said.

"You serious?" Max mumbled.

"Very funny, man," Steve said. "Nice. Very nice."

"Jesus," Max said. "What an idiot."

"Hang on," Dustin said getting up. "Wait, wait."

Queenie sighed getting up and following the rest of them. Steve led them until they reached an opening in the tunnels.

"Alright, Wheeler," Steve said. "I think we found your hub."

They got out the gas cans covering every inch of the hub until they ran out of gasoline.

"Alright," Steve said as they waited in their escape tunnel. "You guys ready?"

"Ready," Lucas said then right after Max said, "Ready," as well.

Steve dug out his lighter.

"Light her up," Dustin said.

Steve let out a sigh. "I am in such deep shit." Then he threw the lighter setting the entire hub ablaze. "Go, go, go!"

Queenie led the kids back through the tunnels the way they had come. Suddenly Mike started screaming "Help!" A vine had wrapped its way around his ankle. Queenie and the other kids pulled on Mike while Steve beat the vine back. Noticing him struggle, Queenie cocked the shotgun and shot it.

Steve nodded in thanks before saying. "We gotta go!"

"Guys, we gotta go," Queenie insisted.

They were then interrupted by a growling. Steve held the bat up threateningly and Queenie cocked the shotgun, but the demo-dog wasn't attacking.

Dustin stepped forward ignoring Queenie's whispered protests. "Dart?" Everyone started protesting but Dustin shushed them. "Trust me, please." He stepped towards it. "Hey, it's me. It's me." He took off his mask and goggles. "It's just your friend. It's Dustin. It's Dustin, alright? Do you remember?" He bent down next to it. "Will you let us pass?"

The demo-dog roared at him.

"Okay, okay," Dustin said. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry about the storm cellar. That was a pretty douchey thing to do. You hungry? Yeah?" He reached for his backpack.

"He's insane," Lucas whispered.

"Don't," Mike scolded.

"Hush," Queenie hissed.

"I've got our favorite," Dustin continued. "Nougat." He produced a candy bar. He opened it offering it to the monster. "Look at that. Yummy. Here, alright? Eat up, buddy. Come on. Come on." Dustin gestured to the rest of them to pass by.

"Let's go," Steve whispered leading them quickly past.

They waited for Dustin in the tunnel as he said goodbye to Dart.

They made it back to the hole that they came in at. Steve and Queenie started lifting kids up one at a time. They started with Max then Mike then Lucas. They could hear the monsters getting closer and closer. They lifted up Dustin then turned as a demo-dog roared right beside them.

"Queen," Steve yelled kind of panicked. "I'm gonna lift you up."

Queenie shook her head. "Like hell if I'm gonna let you fight these things alone, Stevie."

"I wasn't asking," Steve said. "I was telling."

"St-"

"STOP FIGHTING AND GET UP HERE!" Dustin yelled at them.

While they were arguing the demo-dogs had fallen and retreated. Steve helped Queenie up before she turned around and helped pull him out.

Queenie smoothed out Billy's hair. Romeo and Queenie had brought Max and him back to their house in Billy's car to wait for him to wake up.

Billy began to stir. He groaned opening his blue eyes and looked into Queenie's concerned brown ones.

"Hey, hey, hey," she leaned down giving him a kiss on the cheek. "Don't move too much."

"Queenie?" He asked groggily. He looked around squinting against the light. "Where am I?"

"My place," Queenie said. "I figured it wouldn't be good if I brought you home knocked out even if Max was with us."

Billy nodded in understanding. He sat up. "Hey, babe, I'm sorry about-"

Queenie silenced him with a kiss. "Don't worry about it, sweetie. I understand... You..." she sighed. "You deserve the truth." Queenie proceeded to tell him everything about her mother, brother, and the kidnapping back in Texas. She didn't sugar-coat her PTSD. She did, however, say that maybe they should try a slightly slower sex next time.

Billy pulled the girl into a hug as she finished the story. Queenie smiled to herself. She stretched up kissing him. The kiss slowly grew more passionate.

A few weeks later, Queenie is over helping Max with her hair and makeup for the "Snowball". Susan, Queenie, and Max had spent the last few hours dancing to Queenie's Queen albums and fixing her hair.

"Don't stop me now," Queenie sang as she sprayed Max's hair. "I'm having such a good time."

Susan applied a light lipstick, and Queenie almost ran into her. "Oh! Careful," Susan laughed lightly. Out of all the girls Billy had dated since she started seeing Neil, Queenie was her favorite.

"Sorry, Sue," Queenie laughed before stepping back and admiring Max. "Oh, Maxie! You look beautiful!"

Susan stepped beside Queenie and nodded in agreement. "You are gorgeous, Max." She cupped her daughter's face.

There was a knock at the door. Queenie slipped over to it to find her boyfriend on the other side. "Hey." She pecked his lips.

"Hey," Billy smiled. "You girls ready to go?"

Queenie kissed him again this time slightly longer. "Just a few more minutes."

Billy growled in frustration. "Hurry," he whispered. "Dad's on my ass."

Queenie nodded in understanding. She stretched up whispering in his

ear. "I'll get on your ass later." She gave him a lingering kiss underneath his ear.

Billy smirked pulling her into one last kiss before Queenie shut the door on him.

Queenie turned around to see Susan containing a mischievous smile and Max looking at her disgusted. "Don't give me that look Max." Queenie walked over to her closet getting out Max's dress. "Let's get you dressed."

Susan and Queenie helped Max into her dress and shoes. Queenie took a few pictures of the girl before they headed out to Billy's car. Max scrambled into the back while Queenie took the front seat.

"You look nice," Billy said before tearing away towards the middle school.

They arrived waving goodbye as Max practically ran out of the car.

Billy smirked turning to Queenie. "Now about that promise?"

Queenie bit her lip smiling. "Dad's out of town. He just published his first fiction book. He's promoting it."

Billy smiled leaning across the console and giving her a passionate kiss. "Perfect." Then he sped off towards the Calabrese's residence.

18. Chapter 1: Suzie, Do You Copy?

"My last relationship?" Queenie said thinking back on it. She was sitting in a colorful summer dress, spiked leather jacket, and leather thigh high boots. Her hair was dyed purple. She had glitter covering most of her body and a bisexual flag on her lap like a blanket. The old woman sitting beside her in a wheelchair had the transgender flag draped across the back of it. She had been speaking to Queenie for the last hour or so. She had told Queenie about serving in a battalion in the war and being at Stonewall where they had lost many of their brothers and sisters. She had told Queenie about her immigrant family that came to the States before the Red Army took over Russia. She was now asking Queenie about her life. "My last relationship looked good on the outside, but..." She hesitated. "We had a lot of internal problems. The biggest one being that he would get angry and hurt my internal organs." She cracked a half-hearted smile. "It lasted a lot longer than I thought, we were together for about six months. And I really do... did love him. If he wasn't abusive, it might have actually worked out."

The old woman, Valeriya, smiled. "It can be hard when you love someone abusive." Valeriya took a deep breath. "I used to love this man who would get angry if I was out with friends past a certain time. He would yell at me until I cried when I got home. He never hit me though." Valeriya sighed. "And another woman, I used to date used to hit me or twist my ear to get me to do what she wanted." Valeriya looked at Queenie tears shining in her eyes. "For years, I was ashamed for loving abusive people." Valeriya took Queenie's hand in her own. "Never be ashamed for it, darling. Loving abusive people is different than loving non-abusive people, and people that have never loved an abusive person can't understand the feeling."

Queenie smiled at the old woman tears shining in her eyes. "Thank you, Val." Queenie let a few tears fall crying openly now. "Thank you for talking to me. Thank you for sharing your story with me."

"Queenie," Valeriya kissed her hand in a grandmotherly way. "Darling, you don't have to thank me."

Queenie's sobbing became more. "I'm sorry," she gave a forced smile

failing to stop the tears. "My nonna... she... You remind me of her before I was out."

Valeriya pulled the young woman into a hug.

Queenie sobbed into her shoulder. "My dad and I left Texas and our entire family because when my nonno and nonna, both sets, found out about my sexuality they didn't approve of me. They're very catholic and think I'm going to hell for loving both men and women. Papá couldn't lose me again, not when he just got me back, so he elected to lose his parents."

"I am so sorry," Valeriya said. "No one should have to choose between family members."

Queenie wiped her tears from her face. "Thank you, Valeriya."

"Please," Valeriya said putting a hand on her arm. "Call me babushka."

Queenie smiled gratefully. Valeriya got out a marker and very shakily wrote a number on Queenie's arm.

"Call me, darling," she said. "Anytime, you need some grandmotherly advice."

Queenie giggled. A man, probably the age of Queenie's father, Romeo, or possibly older came over to the two. "Are you ready to go, mama?"

"You must be, Nikodim," Queenie said standing up. "It has been lovely talking to your mother." Queenie held out her hand for him to shake.

Nikodim took it smiling at her. "I go by Niko. Would you like to walk with us in the parade? I've been bringing my mom since she came out."

Queenie smiled then nodded. "My papá couldn't make it," she explained. "He came with me to Chicago Pride, but he couldn't come this time because he was sending in his final draft of his sequel today."

"Your father writes?" Valeriya asked. "What does he write about?"

"Oh, he writes about a variety of things," Queenie said. "But this is his first venture into fiction. It's a combination of science fiction and horror. My father is Romeo Calabrese per-"

"You're the daughter of Romeo Calabrese!" a boy probably around Queenie's age exclaimed. "Sorry," he blushed looking down. "I didn't mean to eavesdrop. I just love his book *The Upside Down*. I love the story, not only is it suspenseful and compelling it has a satisfying ending that keeps it open enough for more story. I also love the way he wasn't afraid to tackle queer topics in this turbulent climate."

Queenie smiled. If only this guy knew that every bit of it was true. "I'm Queenie."

"Jamie," he said, holding out his hand. Queenie shook it. "So, you're why he wrote a queer character so well?"

Queenie giggled. "Yeah, she's me... in a way."

Jamie and Queenie launch into a conversation about Romeo's book.

A blonde-haired woman who looked a little older than Queenie and Jamie walked up beside the two. "Jamie, are you really talking about that book? At pride!?"

"Pride is about celebrating ourselves," Jamie complained. "Besides this is Queenie Calabrese; she's the author's daughter."

The girl's eyes widened. "Whoa! I didn't know! I'm Sierra. I'm this idiot's best friend and a big lesbian."

Queenie laughed. "Well, I'm a big bisexual, and I make bad decisions sometimes."

Sierra and Jamie laughed. "Celebrate your bad decisions, Queenie," Sierra said. "We all make them."

"We're all better than the American government though," Jamie said.

Queenie and Sierra laughed at his joke. "In the spirit of Stonewall,"

Queenie said.

"In the spirit of Stonewall," Sierra repeated smiling at Queenie. "We should get drinks sometime."

"Uh," Queenie smiled awkwardly. "I'm only nineteen."

"Then we'll get non-alcoholic drinks," Sierra said looping her arm through Queenie's and happily marching down the street with her.

Queenie shot a questioning look to Valeriya who gave her a chuckle and thumbs up.

Sierra laughed as Queenie told a story about how her brother ended up breaking his wrist when they were kids. "Did he really think that was a good idea?"

"He was twelve," Queenie said laughing. "Good ideas weren't in his vocabulary."

Sierra laughed again leaning slightly closer to Queenie. Her eyes darted everywhere landing on the sun pendant shining on Queenie's neck. She picked it up. "This is pretty."

Queenie took it from her hiding it in her shirt. "Thanks. It was my brother's."

Sierra looked at her confusedly before brushing the comment off completely. "So, what do you think of the city that never sleeps?"

Queenie laughed. "I think it's time to sleep in this city that never sleeps."

Sierra's smile fell. "I was kinda... hoping you'd... stick around for awhile," she said.

Queenie smiled awkwardly. "Thank you, really, Sierra, I'm flattered, but I'm taking a break from romantic relationships. I just got out of a long, abusive relationship, and I just want some time to adjust." The truth is it had been almost two months since her and Billy broke up,

but she was scared of starting a relationship because of what she called the "Relationship Curse". Every person that Queenie had allowed herself to romantically love in the last few years hasn't ended well. Barb was brutally murdered. Jonathan ended up loving someone else. And Billy was abusive and manipulative.

Queenie was perfectly happy with her friendships, though her friendships, most felt like being pseudo parent now. She at least had Steve, her now officially established best friend and fellow class of '85 graduate, to help her parent those young teenagers.

"I'm sorry if I led you on," Queenie said offering Sierra a smile.

Sierra smiled sadly. "No, don't apologize. It's okay." Sierra took her hand comfortingly. "I get it. My last girlfriend used to manipulate me into things all the time."

Queenie nodded before paying for her drink and slipping off to head back to her hotel room for the night. She was leaving first thing in the morning and wanted to get as much rest as possible.

When Queenie's alarm went off at 5 AM, she really didn't want to get up. She grabbed a granola bar and put on shorts and a tank top.

She checked out of the hotel and got in her car, well, her father's car. Romeo didn't trust the old truck to go all the way to New York. He did well to think so too. Queenie dreaded the drive alone. It wasn't that she would get lonely or anything. It's that she was afraid of getting kidnapped or murdered again. If he hadn't had to work, she would have dragged Steve with her. She had asked Jonathan, but he had that new job at the Hawkins Post.

Because of this fear, she kept a pistol in the console beside her and only stopped when absolutely necessary.

By twilight, she had reached Indiana, and it was only a few more hours to Hawkins where yet again another problem was waiting for her.

19. Chapter 2: The Mall Rats

Queenie reached into the glove compartment producing a cassette tape that her father had made their mother in 1980. He had put a bunch of music on it that they liked during their teenage years and their twenties. She smiled to herself, remembering her family listening to it together and reminiscing memories of the years gone by. That was the last year their family was whole. The thought of the old albums sent Queenie into a memory of her mother and everything she used to share with Dominique and Queenie. Loreta had loved detective films from her childhood, but felt, because they had given her nightmares, they might be too scary for her children. Queenie smiled remembering how Loreta would excitedly watch Scooby Doo: Where Are You? with them when given the chance. With as much as her mother liked detective films and mysteries, it always seemed odd she became a US marshall rather than a detective.

The memory of her mother's smile then it shattering to bits jolted Queenie back to reality. Seeing something, no someone, in the road Queenie slammed on her breaks. She luckily didn't hit them. She peered out at them, not believing what she saw. She put the car in park and stepped out yelling at her ex-boyfriend. "BILLY!"

He turned panic and fear in his blue eyes. He was hurt. He had an open bleeding gash on his head. He was covered in sweat and grime. "Queenie," he mumbled.

"Billy," Queenie walked over to him. "Ar- are you alright?"

Billy's eyes shifted to her darkening. "I'm fine, Que." He seemed to want to say more, but instead he started walking to his car.

Against her better judgement, Queenie followed him. "Do you need to go to the hospital? You look pretty beat up."

"I'm fine, Queenie," Billy said getting more annoyed.

"It's ju-"

Billy turned on her. "Stay away from me, Queenie," he snapped.

Queenie nodded quickly then ran back to her car. She drove the rest of the way home, smiling when her father greeted her at the door.

Romeo hugged her tightly. "How was it, principessa?"

"It was amazing," she said breaking their hug. "I think I liked it more than Chicago. Not that I didn't love Chicago, it's just New York had more women in attendance. And I relate to them a lot more."

Romeo nodded in understanding. The two continued talking about Queenie's experience over dinner. After a few hours, they both went to bed.

Queenie stepped out of her truck at the Starcourt mall and smiled as she noticed two girls stepping off the bus. She rushed over to them. "Max! Elle!"

The two girls turned to the woman dressed in thigh high leather boots, shorts, a sequin rainbow tube top, and a spiked leather jacket. Her new nose ring shining in the summer sun. "Queenie!" They exclaimed running over to her. The three of them hugged.

"What'd I miss while I was gone?" Queenie asked.

Max and Elle shared a smile. "We're going to show, Elle, there's more to life than boys," Max said grabbing the woman's hand.

"Did you and Mike have a fight?" Queenie asked looking at Elle.

Elle nodded.

"Then let's show him what he's missing out on," Queenie said.

The three of them made their way into the mall. Elle was looking around amazed as Max asked. "So, what should we do first?" Max laughed. "You've never been shopping before, have you?"

Elle shook her head.

"Well, then I guess we're just gonna have to try everything," Max said.

Max looked over noticing the gap. She grabbed Elle's hand running over to it. "Ooh, come on."

Queenie shook her head trying to contain her smile as she followed the girls.

"Queenie!" Someone yelled getting her attention.

Queenie turned around before her eyes found Mike, Lucas and Will. Will was waving her over. Queenie smiled walking over to hug the boys. "Hey, what are you boys doing?"

"We're looking for a gift for Elle," Lucas said.

"Why are you doing that?" Queenie asked.

"Because," Mike sighed. "Hopper threatened me. He said if I didn't spend less time with Elle that he'd kill me. And I lied to her about why I couldn't hang out today."

Queenie sighed. "Mike, you don't have to get her a gift to tell her you're sorry. Just tell her the truth about why you lied and never lie to her again."

Lucas slightly shook his head at Mike. Mike sighed unsure of whose advice to take.

Queenie rolled her eyes. "I'll see y'all later, okay? I've gotta go see my idiot best friend."

Queenie found her way through the mall to the ice cream shop that Steve works at, Scoops Ahoy. As she walked through the doors, she heard the sounds of Ratt's Round and Round begin to play over the speakers. Steve stood at the counter helping a few kids who seemed indecisive about what type of ice cream they wanted. Queenie smirked yelling. "Hat's really killing that hair, Harrington!"

Steve's face broke into a grin. "Queenie," he vaulted over the counter causing the kids to scatter out of his way. He grabbed Queenie in a hug lifting her spinning her around.

Queenie laughed. "Put me down, Stevie!"

Steve put her down properly looking at her. "I've missed you, Queen."

Queenie adjusted her tube-top that had fallen a bit in the hug. She patted his chest. "I've missed you too, buddy." She reached into her pocket. "I brought you a gift."

Steve raised his eyebrows. "Really?"

Queenie nodded. She threw whatever was in her pocket up in an arc at Steve. "Glitter!"

Steve blinked the glitter out of his eyes glaring at his friend. "Really, Queen? The hat was already hurting my chances with the ladies."

Queenie snickered. "I guess that means you haven't got yourself a girlfriend yet."

Steve rolled his eyes chuckling. "Well, what about you?"

Queenie shrugged. "There was this one girl but not yet."

Steve took his hat off shaking the glitter off his face and hair onto Queenie.

Queenie swatted him away. "Hey! Quit that!"

"If I have to be covered in glitter, so do you, Calabrese," Steve said.

"I already was, Harrington," she complained.

The bell at the counter started dingling. The group of kids that Steve had been helping were standing there looking very annoyed. Steve rolled his eyes but walked back around the counter. Queenie stood beside it waiting for him to help the kids. Steve knocked on the closed window. "Hey, kid, get out here. There's someone you'd probably like to see."

"I'm kinda busy here, Steve, remember very imp-" Dustin said coming out of the back. He stopped when he saw Queenie standing there.

"Queenie!" Dustin exclaimed running over to her.

"Dustin! You're back from camp!" Queenie smiled hugging the younger boy. She looked down at him. "What are you doing in the back?"

Instead of answering her, Dustin pulls her to the back room where she sees Steve's coworker, who had quickly become Queenie's friend, Robin, a cassette tape recorder, and the board covered in the Russian alphabet.

"Hey," Queenie smiled at Robin. "What have my boys dragged you into?"

Robin smiled. "Your little friend there thinks he's intercepted a super secret Russian spy message."

Queenie looked at Dustin for an explanation.

"Okay, so I made an antenna to contact my girlfriend Suzie from camp that lives in Utah," Dustin explained.

"Whoa, wait, you have a girlfriend that lives in Utah?" Queenie asked.

"Yeah," Dustin said. Queenie gestured for him to elaborate. "She's brilliant and even hotter than Phoebe Cate-"

"Whoa," Queenie said stopping him. "She's hotter than Phoebe Cate? How?" Dustin opened his mouth to answer, but Queenie interrupted him. "Nevermind, you can tell me about Suzie later. What's this about a super secret Russian spy message?"

"Okay," Dustin said. "So, I intercepted a message in Russian." He pressed play on the recorder for her. "Do you think you could help?"

"You realize, I'm Italian, right?" Queenie said looking at them confused. "Russian and Italian aren't very similar languages."

"Que," Robin said before speaking to her in Italian. "You know these boys won't crack this without our help."

Queenie shrugged smirking replying in Italian. "They'd honestly be lost without us."

Robin snickered.

Queenie sighed continuing in Italian. "I've missed you. Next year you're coming with me."

Robin rolled her eyes answering in Italian. "You'll kidnap me if I don't agree, won't you?"

Queenie stiffened at the word but nodded happily. Robin and Queenie weren't as close as she would've hoped. She had talked to her a bit during Junior year, but Senior year she didn't at all. She feels bad about it now.

Dustin looked between the two girls. "Is that a yes?"

"Da," Queenie said. They began to go over the recording. Queenie noticed a phone that connected them to the other shops in the mall. "Can I use this to make regular phone calls?"

Robin looked at it. She nodded.

"Good," Queenie ran over looking at her arm and typing the number into her phone.

"Whoa, who are you calling?" Dustin asked.

"My babushka," she replied.

"I thought you were Italian," Dustin argued.

"I am," Queenie said moving the speaker away from her mouth. "I met her at Pride."

"Hello?" Valeriya answered.

"Hi," Queenie said. "It's Queenie Calabrese. The girl from the parade. The other day."

"Oh, vnuchka!" Valeriya exclaimed.

Queenie smiled. "Yes. Babushka, do you think you could translate something for me?"

They didn't finish translating the message until the mall was closed that night.

"The week is long," they said together reading it off the board, "The silver cat feeds when blue meets yellow in the west."

Steve closed the gate of the ice cream shop. "I mean, it's just... it just can't be right."

"It's right," Robin snapped.

"Honestly," Dustin said. "I think it's great news."

"How is this great news?" Steve scoffed. "I mean, so much for being American heroes. It's total nonsense."

"Steve," Queenie said. "Did you really think it wouldn't be coded? Everything in military operations are coded."

"A code?" Steve asked. "That's a total stretch."

"I don't know, is it?" Robin snapped.

"You're buying into this?" Steve said.

"Listen," Robin replied. "Just for kicks, let's entertain the possibility that it is a secret Russian transmission. What'd you think they were gonna say? "Fire the warhead at noon"?"

Queenie scoffed looking at her friend. "Oh my god," she said. "That's what you thought it was gonna be like, didn't you?"

"I did not," Steve complained giving his friend a playful shove.

"And Val's translation is correct," Robin continued interrupting their argument. "We know that for sure, so... "the silver cat feeds". Why would anyone talk like that unless they're trying to mask the meaning of their message?"

"Exactly," Dustin agreed.

"And why would anyone mask the true meaning of their message unless the message was somehow sensitive?" Robin asked.

"Exactly," Dustin agreed.

"I guess this confirms your suspicion," Robin said looking at Dustin.

"Evil Russians," Dustin added.

"I can't believe I'm about to agree with this strange child," Robin said laughing. "But yeah totally evil Russians."

"I wouldn't exactly say "evil Russians", "Queenie said. "We still haven't cracked the code."

"And if we don't crack the code, we can't be American heroes," Steve said.

Queenie glared at him. "Thank you, Steven." She turned back to Robin and Dustin. "We should crack the rest of it and look for a pattern."

"A pattern," Dustin said. "Right, like maybe "silver cat" is a meeting place?"

"Or a person," Robin suggested.

"Or a weapon," Dustin added making Queenie roll her eyes.

"It'll probably take a super genius to crack it, but..." Robin said trailing off when she didn't notice Steve behind them. "Where's Steve?"

They turned around noticing him at a coin-operated riding horse. He was digging around in his pockets.

"Hey Steve!" Robin called.

Queenie walked over to him. "You okay there, buddy?"

"Uh, it's a quarter," he mumbled. "I need- Do you have a quarter?"

Queenie reached down into her right boot and produced her wallet.

She dug into the zippered compartment looking for a quarter.

Robin and Dustin ran over to see what was going on as Queenie handed him a quarter.

"You sure, you're tall enough for that ride?" Robin asked jokingly.

Steve put the quarter in the Indiana Flyer ride and it began going.

"Need help getting up, little Stevie?" Robin continued to joke causing Dustin to laugh.

Queenie shot her a look, not really comfortable hearing someone else call him "Stevie" even if it was a joke. She knew it was stupid but that was their fun, play on their names. He called her Queen because like his name, Steven, it ended with a "n", and she called him Stevie because like her name, Queenie, it ended in an "ie".

"Shh," Steve put his hand up to silence them. "Would you two just shut up and listen?"

Dustin and Queenie seemed to notice at the same time what Steve was talking about at the same time. "Holy shit," Dustin mumbled as Queenie said. "Was that playing..."

"The music," Dustin pointed to it because Robin was still looking at them confused. Dustin took off his backpack getting out the tape recorder. "The music!"

He played the recording and the same music could be heard in the background.

20. Chapter 3: The Case of the Missing Lifeguard

Queenie applied a layer of black lipstick in the mirror. She smiled at herself. She was wearing a black leather skirt with chains, black fishnets, a white t-shirt, short black leather boots, and a black leather spiked vest. The punk-style was a new one for her, but she was really enjoying it. She put a nose ring in then grabbed her bag and went to pick up Dustin.

"So," Dustin said as they drove towards the mall. "You and Steve?"

"What about me and Stevie?" Queenie asked not taking her eyes on the road.

"I don't know, you tell me," Dustin said.

Queenie sighed tapping her rings against the steering wheel. "Steve's a great friend. He... he helped me... when Billy and I were breaking up."

"Like... he was there while you broke up with Billy?" Dustin asked looking at her confused.

Queenie sighed glancing at Dustin. "No..." She took a deep breath, her shoulders slumping slightly. "It's... it's not easy to just... break up with someone like Billy."

"Someone like Billy?" Dustin asked.

Queenie nodded. "You need guaranteed safety. You need support."

Dustin nodded looking down. "Wh-what... Did... Billy..."

"Dust," Queenie sighed putting the truck in park at the mall. She looked at the young boy. "Don't be like me. Don't make shit decisions for the hell of it. Shit decisions aren't fun. They're shit, okay? Just... if someone is ever hurting you... or look like they could hurt you... or they hurt others... stay away from them. Okay?"

Dustin nodded. They walked towards Scoops Ahoy. Steve was behind the counter currently helping a customer. Robin must have been in

the back. Queenie will never understand why they need both of them to work at them same time when there's only ever one of them behind the counter.

Queenie smirked walking up to the counter as the customer left. "Where's the less idiotic one that works here?"

Robin opened the window popping out. "Right here, Que!"

"Rob!" she smiled reaching a hand to her. Queenie walked around the counter to the back room.

"Thanks for that, Queen!" Steve called as the door swung closed.

Robin snickered moving to greet Queenie. Queenie popped her head out of the still open window. "Anything for you, Stevie!" Queenie sat her bag down on the counter in the backroom.

"Dude," Dustin said following Queenie to the back.

Steve turned his arms opening in a shrug. "What's that supposed to mean?" Steve leaned in the window looking into the back room. "So..."

"We have to finish translating this," Queenie said holding the recorder. She looked down at her arm where she had rewritten Valeriya's phone number.

"And now that we know they're here in Hawkins," Robin added.

"We need to look for suspicious Russians," Dustin said.

"Yes," Steve said pointing at Dustin and nodding.

"Would they really be walking around a mall?" Queenie asked.

"It's not just simply walking around, Queenie," Dustin argued.

Queenie made a face mocking his argument but said nothing.

Ignoring Queenie, Steve spoke up. "Dustin and I could scout the mall for this Russian."

Dustin held up his backpack. "I have spy equipment."

"Or, you know, the one that isn't working could help Dustin spy," Queenie said gesturing to herself.

"Don't ruin this for me, Queen," Steve said throwing his hat at her.

Queenie laughed. "Fine, Stevie, help Dusty spy on people in the mall."

Dustin and Steve ran off. Robin went up front to work the counter. They had begun a system. Robin was writing down what she heard in phonetics which Queenie would then call Valeriya and ask her help in translating it. Then Queenie would write down the translation Valeriya gave them.

"So, how far have we gotten?" Queenie asked leaning towards Robin.

"We're almost done," Robin smiled.

"That's good because I'm so bored of this," Queenie complained.

Robin snickered. "Not as much time with The Hair as you thought?"

"What?" Queenie asked tilting her head.

Robin tilted her head in a similar way. "Do you not have a crush on Steve?"

"What?" Queenie laughed. "No! He's really just my best friend. To be honest," she smiled to herself. "The best best friend I've ever had. He helped me when I felt no one else would. And..." Queenie sighed. "I really don't know if I have those type of feelings for Stevie... I'm really confused, you know?"

Robin smiled patting her shoulder. "It's okay, Que. You'll figure it out. You're a smart girl." Robin paused debating with herself. "He cares about you a lot I don't know if he's figured out how yet either."

Queenie smiled turning from the window as Lucas's little sister, Erica, approached with her group of friends.

Erica gave Robin a fake smile as she turned around. "I'd like to try the

peanut butter chocolate swirl, please."

"No," Robin said. "No more samples today."

"Why not?" Erica exclaimed.

"Because you're abusing our company policy," Robin snapped.

"Where's the sailor man?" Erica asked.

"Sorry," Robin said chuckling. "He can't help you. He's busy."

"Busy with what?" Erica snapped.

"Spycraft," Robin replied making Queenie snicker.

Steve and Dustin hid behind a plant in the food court. Steve was looking through the crowd with binoculars.

"See anything?" Dustin asked.

"Uh, I guess I don't totally know what I'm looking for," Steve admitted.

"Evil Russians," Dustin replied.

"Yeah, exactly," Steve said. "I don't know what an evil Russian looks like."

"Tall, blond, not smiling," Dustin said. "Also, look for earpieces, camo, duffel bags, that sort of thing."

"Right, okay. Duffel bags," Steve mumbled. Steve looked through binoculars seeing a girl he had flirted with the other day talking to another guy. "Oh, you've got to be kidding me."

"What?" Dustin asked.

"Anna Jacobi's talking with that meathead, Mark Lewinsky," Steve said.

"Dude," Dustin said annoyed. "If you're not gonna focus, just give me the binoculars."

"Aw, Jesus Christ," Steve complained. "Whatever happened to standards? I mean, Lewinsky never even came off the bench."

"Dude," Dustin snapped. "You are the worst spy in history, you know that?" Dustin grabbed the binoculars that were around Steve's neck.

"Stop," he complained still staring at Anna and Mark. "Hey! Stop!"

"Give me those," Dustin snapped. Steve took the strap off his neck allowing Dustin to take them. "Besides," Dustin began looking through the binoculars. "I don't even get why you're looking at girls anyway. You have the perfect one right in front of you."

"Seriously," Steve rubbed his neck where the strap had been. "If you say Queenie again--"

"Queenie," Dustin said not even looking at Steve.

"No, don't," Steve protested as Dustin began repeating "Queenie" in a mocking tone. "No!" Steve complained his voice growing in frustration. "Stop, no, no, no." This back and forth of "Queenie" and "No!" went on for a while until Steve broke it by saying. "No, man, she's my best friend. She might still care... about her ex, alright?"

"Believe me Steve, even if she still cares about Billy, she doesn't want to get back with him," Dustin said.

"That doesn't mean she cares about me. Besides she's not my type, and I'm not hers. Have you seen how much leather she wears? It's the summer. And she's loud. She's loud about everything. And she protests. No, that's not a good look. And she has this whole collection of pictures, that's she taken? No," Steve complained.

"And yet you're her best friend," Dustin mumbled.

"That's different than dating," Steve said.

Dustin lowered the binoculars looking at Steve annoyed. "Now that you're out of high school, which means you're technically an adult,

don't you think it's time you move on from primitive constructs such as popularity?"

"Oh primitive constructs?" Steve snapped. "That some stupid shit you learned at Camp..." He looked at Dustin's hat that said "Camp Know Where". "Know... nothing?"

"Camp Know Where, actually," Dustin corrected. "And no it's shit I learned from life."

Steve scoffed in disbelief.

"Instead of dating somebody you think makes you cooler," Dustin said. "Why not date someone you actually enjoy being around? Like me and Suzie."

"Oh Suzie," Steve said sarcastically. "You mean 'hotter than Phoebe Cates'. Yeah, that Suzie. And, uh, let's think about how exactly did you score that beautiful girlfriend?" He scratched his head in mock confusion before nodding. "Oh, yeah. With my advice."

"With your and Queenie's advice," Dustin corrected.

Steve rolled his eyes. "Well, that's how this works Henderson. We give you the advice, you follow through. Not the other way around, alright, peabrain?"

Dustin lowered the binoculars and glared at Steve before continuing their search.

Robin and Queenie sat on the counter of Scoops Ahoy going over the translation of the message.

"A trip to China sounds nice if you tread lightly," Robin mumbled. "Tread lightly." She picked up Dustin's English to Russian dictionary and started looking for the phrase when there was a knock at the back door of the shop.

The girls sighed but went back to open the door. It was a delivery man so Queenie let Robin handle it while she looked at Val's

translation again. Steve and Dustin came back into the shop causing Queenie to look up at them.

"You're not gonna believe who Dustin thought was a Russian," Steve said.

"You did too!" Dustin complained.

"No, I did not," Steve argued as Robin rushed past them.

"Rob!" Queenie yelled following the girl. "Don't leave me alone with these idiots!"

The boys watched the two girls rush out of the shop. Robin stood up on a bench mumbling to herself. "A trip to China sounds nice."

Queenie looked at her confused.

Robin kept mumbling the phrase to herself until she spotted the Imperial Panda in the food court.

"If you tread lightly," Queenie said pointing to Kaufman Shoes.

Robin nodded. "When... when blue and yellow-"

"Meet in the west," Queenie interrupted pointing to the clock that had a blue and a yellow hand. "But which is west?"

"9:45," Robin said.

"Guys," Steve said as Dustin and him walked up. "What are you doing?"

Robin and Queenie glanced at each other sharing a smile.

"We cracked the code," Robin said jumping down off the bench.

Queenie really regretted not grabbing her jacket this morning. It was pouring and they were watching a delivery from the roof. And all Queenie had was this stupid vest.

"Look for Imperial Panda and Kaufman Shoes," Robin shouted.

Dustin was looking through his binoculars. "They're with that whistling guy, ten o'clock."

"What do you think is in there?" Steve asked.

"Guns, bombs?" Dustin suggested.

"Chemical weapons?" Robin added.

"Okay, but why would they set up the operation here in Hawkins, Indiana?" Queenie snapped.

Dustin sighed. "Whatever it is, they're armed to their teeth."

"Great," Steve said sarcastically. "That's great."

Queenie wiped the mascara out of her eyes. "I can't see shit." Queenie sighed wiping her eyes with the tail of her shirt. "Ugh, this shirt is ruined... and soaked!?"

Steve shot her a look. "You're the one that didn't bring a rain jacket."

"Look, Steven, I'm dumb and bisexual," Queenie snapped. "That's literally my personality."

One of the men guarding the door stuck a card into the mechanism beside it making the doors open up.

"Hey," Robin said. "What's in there?"

"It's just more boxes," Dustin yelled.

"Let me check it out," Steve said grabbing the binoculars.

"No," Dustin protested. "I'm still looking." They wrestled with the binoculars.

"Boys, boys," Queenie sighed. "We have more pressing matters."

In their scuffle the binoculars slammed against the metal bar in front of them. This put the guards on high alert and they reached for their

guns.

"Duck!" Dustin exclaimed as they all slumped down behind the wall. Steve and Robin grabbed each other's hand in the panic. Queenie peaked very carefully over the edge. There's no way they're getting out of here without a distraction. She looked down at her skirt and the chained belt attached to it.

"You boys owe me a new chain," Queenie hissed. She ripped one of the chains off and threw it off the roof towards the door.

The guards yelled in Russian at each other to follow the noise.

"Go, go," Queenie whispered ushering the rest of them to the door that lead back to the stairs.

One of the Russian guards pointed to the roof where the chain had come from as Steve slowly shut the door. They hurried down the stairs and found their way into the back halls of the mall.

"That was close," Robin said catching her breath.

"Too close," Dustin

Queenie took off her boots and undid the button on her skirt. She slipped off her soaked fishnets and wrung them out.

"Uh, Queen, what are you doing?" Steve asked as Queenie threw off her vest then turned around slipping her shirt over her head.

"Trying not to leave an obvious water trail," Queenie said wringing out the t-shirt.

"When did you get a tattoo?" Steve asked.

Queenie smiled remembering the tattoo of the sun and moon she got as a sort of graduation celebration to honor her brother. "Not long after graduation." Queenie tied her wet hair up in a messy bun and turned around to grab her vest. She didn't really care about the others being there. Steve instantly covered Dustin's eyes which was followed by Robin, albeit red in the face, covering Steve's eyes.

Queenie snickered. "Y'all do know that I don't care? It's not any worse than a swimsuit." Queenie slipped on her vest and zipped it up then pulled on her boots again. Queenie opened the back door to Scoops Ahoy and threw her wet clothes in there. "Alright? Y'all ready to get out of here?"

21. Chapter 4: The Sauna Test

The next day, Steve, Robin, Queenie, and Dustin were all in the back room of Scoops Ahoy discussing how to get into the secret room.

"That keycard opens the door," Dustin said, "But unfortunately, the Russian with this keycard also has a massive gun."

"What if we fought back with our own massive gun?" Queenie mumbled picking at her black nail polish.

"You want to fight a trained Russian soldier?" Steve asked looking at her with disbelief.

Queenie shrugged. "I'll take those odds."

"Whatever's in this room," Dustin continued ignoring his two older friends as he so often does. "Whatever's in these boxes, they really don't want anybody finding it."

"But there's gotta be a way in," Robin said.

"Well," Steve threw down the hat he had been spinning. "You know... I could just take him out."

Queenie snickered. "Like you took out Billy? Or Jonathan? Oh wait..." Queenie tapped her chin. "You didn't win either of those fights."

"So I'll sneak up behind him," Steve said.

"Did you not hear the part about the massive gun?" Dustin asked.

"Yeah, I did," Steve said glaring at him. "That's why I'll sneak."

"Okay but how well did sneaking up on Billy work?" Queenie snapped standing up to tower over him as he sat.

"I'm pretty sure it saved your neck," Steve snapped also standing up.

"At the expense of your face!" Queenie yelled.

Robin, ignoring their argument, ran out of the room grabbing the cash out of the tip jar.

"Robin," Steve said noticing her finally. "Hey Robin! Hey, what- what are you doing?" They followed her out of the backroom.

"I need cash," Robin stated.

"Well, half of that's mine," Steve complained. "Where you going?"

"To find us a way into that room, a safe way," Robin said. "And, in the meantime, sling ice cream, behave, and don't get beat up."

"I'll be back in a jiff," Robin said before running off.

Dustin scooped some ice cream and licked it off the scoop.

"Oh, dude," Steve complained jerking the scoop out of his hand. "Come on man, not my scooper!"

Steve went to put it up but Queenie yelled before he could. "Eww, wash that!"

Steve rolled his eyes at her but did as she demanded.

They had gotten bored waiting for Robin to return. Dustin was messing with the recording again. Queenie stood at the window trying to complete a sudoku. And Steve though helping customers as well was currently stacking cones.

Queenie bit her lip. Now is a good a time as any to ask him. "Stevie, can I ask you a weird question?"

"That's already a weird question, but go ahead, Queen," he said, putting the cones back up.

"Okay," she took a deep breath. "So, you know how I've been looking into apartments in Chicago for fall?" Steve nodded. "Well, like, I'm really scared to live alone, but like I have to live in Chicago to attend Northwestern and Dad's settled down here in Hawkins and he really likes Hawkins and well I can't live on campus because that costs way too much and... What I'm trying to say is, would you get an

apartment and a cat with me and live in Chicago? Not as like a couple or anything, just as like friends and roommates and-" Queenie sighed avoiding Steve's eyes. "It's just you helped me a lot with Billy, and you clearly care about me. And Dad likes you, and I trust you. And I ju-"

"Queenie," Steve interrupted making her look up. "I would love to adopt a cat and live with you in Chicago. My dad's not gonna like it-"

"But there are jobs in Chicago," Queenie said smiling.

Steve smiled. "Exactly."

Queenie sighed in relief grabbing his hand and giving it a grateful squeeze. "I guess I'll have to look for two bedroom apartments now because," she gestured between them, "we cannot share a room."

Steve laughed. "That's a fact."

At that moment Robin came rushing in carrying something. Steve followed Robin to the back room where she laid out blueprints. "Starcourt Mall, the complete blueprints."

"Not bad," Dustin said.

"So," Robin pointed on the blueprints. "This is us, Scoops. And this," she pointed to another place on the blueprints. "Is where we wanna get."

"Okay, if you're gonna build a super secret storage room, why put it on the public blueprints?" Queenie asked to no one in particular.

Steve shot her a look which she waved off. "I mean I don't really see a way in."

"There's not," Robin said ripping off part of the blueprints. "If you're talking exclusively about doors."

Dustin looked up at her. "Air ducts."

"Exactly," Robin said excitedly.

"Okay bu-" Queenie was cut off by a sound coming from her bag.

"Queenie," Lucas said through the walkie-talkie. "Do you copy?"

Queenie dug around pulling out the walkie-talkie. "Yeah, Lucas, I copy. What'd you need?"

"We need your specific area of expertise," Lucas said.

"My expertise on what Luke? I'm a bit busy, right now," Queenie said looking at the ducts on the blueprints.

"It's a specific set of skills we need in person," Lucas continued.

"Yeah," Queenie said distracted. "Not following ya, Luke."

"Oh my god," Max said through the walkie talkie. There were sounds of a scuffle then Max spoke again. "Queenie, it's Billy."

Queenie almost dropped the walkie talkie but managed to catch it before it hit the ground. "Come again?"

"It's Billy," Max repeated. "We need your help with Billy."

Steve snatched the walkie talkie out of Queenie's hand speaking into it. "NO! No, no, no, no. She's not going to help with him."

Queenie sighed putting a hand on Steve's chest. "Stevie, it sounds really important."

"Queen," Steve complained not noticing his anger rising. "I'm not letting you go near a man that broke your ribs and put you in the hospital for a week!"

"Billy broke your ribs!?" Dustin exclaimed.

"Yeah," Queenie hissed glaring at Steve. "And we agreed not to tell the kids!"

"Queenie?" Lucas asked.

"Yeah, Luke," Queenie said. "Let me deal with Steve then I'll get back to you."

"I'm not letting you go," Steve said slamming his hand down.

"Stevie, what if he's hurt one of the kids?" Queenie asked putting her hand on top of his comfortingly. "I'm a big girl. I can take care of myself."

Steve sighed before slowly nodding in agreement.

"Okay, Lucas," Queenie said into the walkie talkie. "What do you need me for?"

"It'll be better if we explain in person," Lucas said.

"Meet us at the pool," Mike added.

"Bring a swimsuit," Max said.

"Over and out," Lucas said ending the connection.

"I'll be safe," Queenie said looking at Steve who looked worried beyond recognition. "If he hurts me, I'll let you heal me up. Meet at my place tonight after we're both done with whatever it is we're doing?"

Steve nodded. "If he hurts you, we're talking to Hopper about that restraining order."

Queenie sighed in defeat. She grabbed her stuff. "Good luck, y'all." She stretched up placing a kiss to Steve's cheek then bent down to give one to Dustin. She started to give a kiss to Robin but stopped herself. "Not close enough for that yet?" Robin chuckled making Queenie laugh. "Okay, see y'all later."

"Wait, wait, wait," Queenie said holding up her hands to stop them. She had stopped by her house, surprised to find it empty, and changed into a sundress with a white bikini underneath and flip flops. "Y'all think Billy is the new host for the Mind Flayer, and you didn't call me sooner?"

"We tried to," Mike complained.

"Yeah," Lucas added equally annoyed. "Neither you or Dustin picked up!"

"Sorry, we found a secret room in the mall," Queenie said.

"You what?" Max exclaimed.

"It's guarded by Russians with guns," Queenie added.

"What!?" Lucas exclaimed.

"That doesn't matter right now," Queenie said. "What do y'all need me to do?"

"We need to test if he's the host," Mike explained.

"So we need you to get him into the sauna," Will said.

Queenie put up her index finger to silence them. "So, y'all want me to seduce my ex-boyfriend... into a sauna!?" She sighed. "And I thought climbing through vents to get to a secret room was weird."

"Seduce is a strong word," Mike said.

"Just like dating was a strong word, eight months ago," Queenie snapped. "Let's examine the facts... y'all... want me... to seduce... my ex-boyfriend... No, no, no, no, no. Y'all want me to seduce my ABUSIVE ex-boyfriend to find out if he's the host of some monster or not."

The kids looked at her guiltily not saying anything.

"Y'all realize the only way Steve let me leave was if I promised not to get hurt!?" Queenie snapped.

"Since when do you listen to Steve Harrington?" Mike asked.

"I was coming either way," Queenie said. "I'd just prefer to not worry my best friend."

"Well, we promise that you won't get hurt," Lucas said.

"How can you guarantee that?" Queenie asked crossing her arms.

"I'll keep you safe," Elle said.

Queenie sighed. "Fine, I'll help."

The kids smiled at each other.

"Y'all owe me," she said. The kids nodded in understanding.

Queenie slipped the dress over her head still in disbelief that the kids thought her ex was taken over by the Mind Flayer. If he was in fact, Queenie could see why the Mind Flayer chose Billy rather than Will this time. Billy was stronger than Will, and he could easily get more people to join the army either by brute force or by his charms.

"Hey," Max said approaching Queenie. "Are you gonna be alright?"

Queenie smiled at the red-headed girl. "I'm gonna be completely honest... I don't know."

Max nodded grimly. "I really hope it isn't him."

Queenie bit her lip. "Me too, Max." Queenie hugged her. "I can't think of what we'd have to do if it is him."

Max let a tear escape mumbling. "Please, don't let it be him."

"You two ready?" Mike asked rushing in.

Queenie and Max nodded. Queenie threw Will her dress then found her way into the sauna. The kids started the trap by locking him in the locker room. Once Queenie heard the pounding on the door and the lights shut off, she yelled. "Billy!"

When Queenie didn't hear an answer she called in a sing-songy voice. "Biiiiiiilllly!"

"Who's there?" Billy called in the same sing-songy tone.

"It's me, sweetie," Queenie yelled her voice echoing through the locker room. "I've missed you."

"Queenie," he mumbled to himself then called again. "Where are you?"

"Come and find me, sweetheart!" Queenie yelled. "It's more fun that way. Let's make it hot." Billy burst through the door of the workout room and stared straight into the sauna.

"Found you," he smirked.

Queenie twisted her tongue around. "I thought this could make things a bit hotter. So..." she smirked. "Let's get steamy."

Billy rushed into the sauna capturing her by the waist in one swoop. Queenie giggled capturing his lips in a heated kiss. "I told you to stay away from me," he growled.

"I never listened," Queenie said before capturing another kiss. Billy began to trail kiss down her jaw as she locked eyes with Eleven. "Billy, someone's behind you!"

Billy dropped Queenie and turned around to face Elle. This gave Queenie the opportunity to roll out of the way as Elle used her powers to slam Billy into the wall. Queenie ran out of the sauna slamming the door shut as the kids barred and chained it. Billy pounded on the door trying to get it open but to no avail. Will handed Queenie her dress which she slipped on as the pounding on the door and the rattling of the chains stopped.

Queenie looked up to see Billy staring at Max. "Max," he said.

They all looked at the red-headed girl who seemed to be having an internal war over what to do with her stepbrother before saying. "Do it."

Will rushed over to the controls and turned the sauna all the way up.

"Max!" Billy yelled his anger returning. "Let me out of here! Let me out."

Queenie held back tears, because even though she knew he was a total scumbag that didn't deserve it there was still parts of her that cared about him, hell there were parts of her that still loved him.

"You kids..." he said not even glancing at Queenie. "You think this is funny? You kids think this is some kind of sick prank, huh?" He continued to yell at the kids, but Queenie had drowned it out.

Queenie took a step towards the controls.

"What are you doing!?" Mike asked.

"That's clearly, Billy," Queenie snapped. "Not Billy taken over by some monster. That's just normal Billy."

"Que wait a second," Will said. Queenie shot him an annoyed look. "Please!" Queenie sighed in annoyance but complied.

"Que," Billy said getting Queenie's attention. "Come on. Did these kids drag you into this? Open the door." Queenie swallowed doing her best to stand her ground. "Open the door! Open the goddamn door!" Billy dropped out of view and screamed.

Will went over and checked the temperature. "We're at 220." He returned to his spot beside Queenie.

The silence was broken by the sound of Billy sobbing. "It's not my fault. It's not my fault. It's not my fault, Max. I promise you, it's not my fault." Max walked up to the door peering in at her brother sitting on the floor begging.

"Max," Queenie said grabbing the young girl's arm. "Max, don't fall for it."

"Queenie," Billy said still begging. "I swear, this time, it's not my fault."

"What's not your fault Billy?" Max asked as Queenie lost her grip on her arm. She looked in at her ex-boyfriend the sight shocking her to her core. Billy had tried a lot of tactics for her forgiveness, but this was not usually one of them.

"I've done things," he said, his voice cracking with sobs. "Really... bad things. I didn't mean to. He made me do it."

"Who made you do it?" Max asked.

"I don't know," he admitted. "It's like a shadow."

Queenie stepped back in shock and fear. He was being truthful. He was actually hurting this much.

"Like a giant shadow," he continued. "Please, Max."

"What did he make you do?" Max asked.

"It's not my fault, okay? Max, please," Billy yelled again rolling over onto his side.

Queenie moved Max out of the way. "We're gonna help you, sweetie, okay?"

"Queenie, please, believe me. It's not my fault," Billy continued to sob.

"You have to trust us, Billy," Queenie continued. "We can help you."

"I tried to stop him, I did," Billy continued his cries getting more desperate.

Queenie noticed tears in Max's eyes as she leaned in closer to the window. She felt tears threaten to spill out of her eyes as well but blinked them back. She had to be strong for both of them.

"Please believe me," Billy whispered over and over.

"It's gonna be okay, Billy," Max said. "It's gonna be okay. We want to help you. You just have to talk to us, okay? You have to talk to us."

Neither of the girl's noticed Will touching the back of his neck as the chills that warned him previously of the Mind Flayer's presence.

"Guys, get away from the door," Mike mumbled.

"What?" Max asked as Queenie forcefully shoved the girl behind her only stepping from the door a bit.

"Get away from the door!" Mike yelled as the window of the door busted open. Shattered glass sprayed out at Queenie as she shielded

Max from it.

"LET ME OUT!" Billy yelled having burst through the door's window. Queenie shoved Max towards the other kids. Fear striking up her spine. "LET ME OUT YOU BITCH!" Queenie felt the fear melt out of her as she spotted a dumbbell. She didn't know if it was anger or stupidity, perhaps it was both, but she swung the dumbbell down on Billy's hand smashing something. Billy swung the broken tile out at her. "I'll fucking gut you." Billy ripped the bar out of the door.

Queenie held up the dumbbell like a bat. "Let's fucking go, sweetheart!" It was anger, most definitely anger. Lucas grabbed Max and pulled her out of the way as Queenie brought the dumbbell down on Billy's head. This knocked him to the ground giving them enough time to regather and head towards the door. The lights began to flicker making them all stop fleeing.

Billy began throwing himself against the door of the sauna. Elle stepped in front of them shielding everyone with herself.

"He can't get out, can he?" Max asked.

"No way," Lucas said.

Queenie lifted the dumbbell like a weapon again stepping in front of the kids. "That man can break bones; he can break chains."

"Queenie..." Will said a hint of worry in his voice.

"Don't worry," she said, glancing back at him. "It was only a week. I'll be fine."

"Elle, can take this thing," Mike said reaching to pull the woman back.

"She's like fourteen," Queenie snapped. "Much too young to die."

Before any of the kids could argue, the pipe they had chained the door locked to burst off the door and Billy tumbled out of the sauna. Billy stood up. He had dark veins covering his body and a gash on his forehead where Queenie had brought the dumbbell down on it.

Queenie took in a shaky breath. "Hey Billy. If you're still in there, I never wanted to hurt you in retaliation, so I feel bad." She took a deep breath her eyes hardening. "But also this is for that hospital bill." She swung the dumbbell down towards him, but he caught it with one hand stopping it. Billy twisted the dumbbell twisting Queenie's arm until she dropped it. He grabbed her by the throat then threw her into the wall.

Queenie lay dangerously still for a few seconds before slowly pulling herself up not noticing the fight between Billy and Elle. She coughed struggling to catch her breath. When Queenie looked up Billy had Elle by the throat. The other kids were watching helplessly. Queenie drug herself up ignoring every part of her body screaming at her to stay down.

Before Queenie could even fully get to her feet, Mike hit Billy in the back with the pipe that had burst off the wall. Billy fell to the ground dropping Elle. Mike swung again, but Billy turned around catching the pipe. He ripped it out of Mike's hand and advanced on the boy. Mike backed into the wall. Elle, who had recovered, used her powers to lift Billy off the ground. Queenie took this moment to pull Mike out the way and towards relative safety. Elle threw Billy through the wall.

Mike ran over to catch the hurt and crying Elle. Will ran over to help Queenie become steady on their feet. They looked out the new hole in the wall to notice that Billy was limping off into the night.

"Well," Queenie mumbled rubbing her neck in pain with her good arm. "Guess Steve and I'll be talking to Hopper about that restraining order."

The kids looked at her in confusion.

Queenie sighed. "Let's get y'all somewhere safe."

Without an argument, they followed Queenie out to where their bikes were parked near her truck. She piled all of their bikes in the back of her truck and offered them a ride to the Wheeler's.

22. Chapter 5: The Flayed

Steve, Robin, Dustin, and Erica screamed in terror as the room, they had broken into plummeted into the earth.

"Shit! Shit!" Dustin yelled trying the button again.

"We're going down!" Steve yelled. "We're going down!"

"Yeah, no shit, Harrington!" Robin snapped annoyed with her coworker.

"Why don't these buttons work!?" Dustin exclaimed slamming the buttons on the control panel.

Erica stepped over pointing to a button. "Press the button."

"What do you think I'm doing!?" Dustin snapped.

"Come on press something," Steve snapped in a panic. "Just press the button!"

"Push it!" Erica yelled slamming her hand down on the button.

They crashed to the ground harshly. Robin clutched her head in pain. A box came crashing down on Steve's groin causing him to complain. "My groin. It fell on my groin. Dustin!" He strained to lift it off himself. "Get this off me!"

Dustin stumbled over helping Steve to lift the box off himself.

"Is everyone okay?" Robin asked.

"Yeah," Steve snapped angrily standing up. "I'm great, now that I know the Russians can't design elevators!" He shoved Dustin out of the way trying the control panel himself.

"I think we've clearly established that those buttons don't work," Robin said standing up as well.

"They're buttons," Steve exclaimed still angry. "They have to do

something."

"Yeah," Robin snapped. "If we had a keycard."

"A what?" Steve turned to her.

"It's an electronic lock," Robin stated. "Same as the loading dock door. If we don't have a keycard, it won't operate, meaning-"

"We're stuck in here," Dustin interrupted.

"Yeah," Robin said.

Steve slammed the control panel closed running a hand through his hair mumbling. "I cannot be stuck anywhere."

"Just so you nerds are aware," Erica interrupted. "I'm supposed to be spending the night at Tina's, and Tina always covers for me. But if I'm not home for Uncle Jack's party tomorrow and my mom finds out you three are responsible, she's gonna hunt you down, one-by-one, and slit your throat."

"I don't care about Tina!" Steve yelled. "Or Uncle Jack! What I care about is my best friend is on the surface, with her ex-boyfriend, who used to beat her so badly she'd take days off from school! Who put her in the hospital for a week and broke four of her ribs! And I can't go over and make sure she's okay if we're dead IN A RUSSIAN ELEVATOR!"

"Hey," Dustin said getting their attention. He pointed up to the escape hatch. "What if we climbed out?"

Dustin and Steve climbed out on top of the elevator. They looked up at the impossibly far distance. Steve let out a huff. "What were you saying about climbing?"

"Guess you'll have to miss your date with Queenie," Dustin mumbled.

"Yeah," Steve said not processing what he said. He lightly hit the back of Dustin's head. "It's not a date."

Dustin gave him a look of disbelief.

Queenie was far from calm. Steve hadn't arrived at all last night. Her father had left a note saying he went back to talk to some man that helped him with his books. Queenie was surprised to find an old music box out by the note; it had been her mother's. She opened it to find little pieces of jewelry and her marshall badge, that brought tears to Queenie's eyes. Still, she felt compelled to pocket the marshall badge. Queenie changed into her, as she put it, ass-kicking outfit. It was the most spiked outfit she owned. It was a tank top with The Misfits's Walk Among Us album art on it, spiked and studded leather jacket, studded riding gloves, spiked leather choker, leather pants with spikes down the hem, heels with spikes on the toes and heel, and finally metal finger talons. She grabbed the bat with nails in it that Steve had left in her truck one night after the demo-dog incident. She grabbed her mom's sling for the sawed-off and put it on her back then grabbed her mom's holster for the pistol and buckled it around her hips.

Queenie knocked on the Wheeler's front door, hoping that one of the kids opened the door. She was disappointed when she was greeted by the terrified face of Karen Wheeler.

Queenie smiled widely ignoring her brain that was telling her to run. "Hi, Mrs. Wheeler."

"H-hey," She laughed nervously her smile faltering slightly. "Queenie... looking... terrifying as ever."

Queenie laughed keeping her fake smile on her face. "Don't worry, Mrs. Wheeler. It's just an aesthetic. None of it can do actual harm."

Karen smiled nervously. "The kids are downstairs."

"Okay," Queenie pushed past her running down to the basement. "Thanks!"

Queenie stepped off the last stair causing her heel to click on the basement floor drawing the children's attention to her. She smiled and waved.

"Are those claws?" Lucas asked.

Queenie showed them her finger talons. "They're finger talons; originally from Ancient China, they've been adapted to the punk scene. I figured if we'd be fighting monsters, we'd need weapons." She handed the bat to Max. "Aim for the head."

"How are you going to fight any monsters in those shoes?" Mike asked pointing to her heels.

Queenie snorted in laughter rolling her eyes. "The aesthetic is to wake up, look good, kick ass, repeat. Now... can any of you use a pistol?"

"I think I'm ready to try again," said Elle interrupting them.

"Try what?" Queenie asked.

"She's trying to find Hopper," Will explained.

"We've been looking for him all morning," Max said.

They turned on the television to static and gave Elle a blindfold. Within a few silent moments, she said. "I found him."

"Where is he?" Max asked.

"Woods," Elle answered simply.

"Woods?" Lucas repeated confused.

"He's with... Will's mom," Elle continued.

"My- my mom?" Will asked leaning closer.

"What are they doing?" Max asked.

"Ill-annoy," Elle said confusing everyone else. "They're going to Ill-annoy."

There was a knocking at the basement door making Queenie jump out of her skin. "Mike! Breakfast!"

"Not now, Mom!" Mike yelled back. He turned back to Elle speaking normally again. "Illinois? Illinois, like the state? The state of Illinois?"

"Clearly, Micheal," Queenie mumbled before taking Elle into the bathroom with Max to wash Elle's face from her nosebleed.

Elle touched her bruise from where Billy had choked her the night before. This reminded Queenie of all the pain that she had blocked out from the night before. She had been too busy worrying about Robin, Dustin, and Steve to care about her still healing body.

"Does it still hurt?" Max asked.

"Only when I talk," Elle whispered her voice a bit scratchy.

"Well, it's a good thing you're not Mike, then," Max joked. "Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And you'd be in constant pain."

The girls laughed. Queenie smiled at them. "Don't worry about him, Elle. Guys are stupid."

Max giggled. "She should know; she dated my brother."

They laughed. "My best friend is Steve Harrington," Queenie said. "I know all about guys and stupidity."

Elle laughed harder at this statement making Queenie laugh.

"Shh," Max said pointing to the door.

"What are they still doing in there?" Mike asked through the door.

They shared a smirk listening to the boys outside of the door.

"I don't know," Lucas said kind of muffled as if he had something in his mouth. "Girls just like hanging out in bathrooms."

"Why?" Mike snapped.

"I mean, I don't know," Lucas said.

"They're conspiring against me," Mike said.

"That's what you're concerned about," Will hissed.

"It's not my main concern," Mike argued. "It's just a sub-concern."

"I thought it was already over," Will snapped.

"It's not over, okay?" Mike argued making Queenie roll her eyes. "We're just taking a break."

"She said she dumped your ass," Will snapped clearly angry with his friend. "That doesn't sound like a break."

"It wasn't," Max called having enough of their conversation. Elle smirked. "You guys do realize we can still hear everything you're saying, right?"

Elle laughed as Queenie added. "And yes, Mike, we were conspiring against you. Basically, how everyone of your species can be so stupid."

The three of them fell into laughter.

"Conspiring," Mike said. "I told you they were conspiring." This caused them to laugh even more.

There was another knock at the basement door. "NOT NOW MOM!" Mike yelled.

"Open the door, Mike," Nancy called through the door.

Mike ran upstairs to be greeted by Nancy and Jonathan. Queenie, Max, and Elle stepped out of the bathroom as Jonathan and Nancy walked into the room.

"Queenie," Jonathan smiled. "You're back!"

Queenie smiled widely offering her friend a hug. "Yeah, sorry I haven't been around to say. I've been really busy since I got back."

Nancy gave her a shy wave. "Hey, Queenie."

"Nan," Queenie offered her a hug as well. "I'm out of high school. I'm

over that petty high school shit. Besides, without me, you'd always be boring."

"Que!" Nancy complained hugging the older anyways.

"I gave douchebag Steve Harrington a second chance," Queenie mumbled into her shoulder. "You deserve one too."

"Ow," Nancy mumbled rubbing her chest and giggling as they broke the hug.

"Yeah..." Queenie laughed. "I forgot I'm wearing a bunch of spikes."

"So," Mike interrupted. "What are you doing here?"

Nancy began to explain how they got a call at the Post about rats eating fertilizer from a woman, Mrs. Driscoll, and how it led to eventually Mrs. Driscoll eating fertilizer as well. "It was the same thing, the exact same thing that happened to Will last year. And look at this," she handed them a medical chart. "Look at the body temperatures."

"He likes it cold," Will said as they looked at the body temperatures all around the 120s.

"Okay, so this crazy old woman who was eating fertilizer-" Mike said.

"Mrs. Driscoll," Nancy snapped.

"Right, yeah, Mrs. Driscoll," Mike continued. "What time was this attack?"

"Last night," Nancy said.

"Right, what time last night?" Mike asked clarifying his question.

"Around 9:00," Nancy said.

"You waited all night to call?" Jonathan asked looking at her worriedly.

"I was waiting for the doctors to run some tests," Nancy replied.

"You weren't there?" Will asked looking at Jonathan accusingly.

"Well, I'm here now," Jonathan said.

"All this aside, because I'm not where I'm supposed to be either, and who knows what's happening to Robin, Dustin, and Steve without me around," Queenie interrupted putting up her hand to stop them. "Nine o'clock is about the time I seduced Billy into the sauna last night, right?"

"Can you stop putting it that way?" Mike groaned in frustration.

"How else am I supposed to put it?" Queenie asked her frustration growing. "I'm worried, like really fucking worried. My best friend never showed up last night, and last I knew they were looking for a way into a secret room controlled by an enemy of the state. So I have no idea what happened to Steve, my best friend, Robin, my only friend besides Nancy now with brain cells-

"Hey!" Jonathan protested.

"And Dustin, a kid that I consider to be like my child, and on top of all that this monster is back and it's taken over my ex-boyfriend, whom I still love-" Queenie cut herself off slamming her hands over her mouth.

"You still love my brother?" Max asked looking at her confused. "But you broke up with him."

"It's complicated," Queenie protested. "How long do we have? Because it took me months to finally tell Stevie everything. And that's only because he dragged me to the hospital then I had to explain why I had four broken ribs."

"Wait," Jonathan snapped looking at his older friend with concern. "Billy is the one who broke your ribs!?"

"How did you know someone broke my ribs!?" Queenie snapped looking at him suspiciously.

"I wasn't buying that shit that you broke them by accident," Jonathan said.

"Wait," Nancy said causing both of them to look at her. "Billy was hurting you, and you didn't tell anyone until Steve dragged you to the hospital?"

Queenie pressed her lips together guiltily. "I didn't even want to tell him then. I thought I could handle it myself."

"I don't understand," Elle said. "If Billy loved you, why did he hurt you?"

Queenie laughed a crazy look in her eyes. "I have the same question, Elle." She laid her head back on the couch mumbling. "Love is stupid and blind, and it makes you lose all sense. And it's even worse when you love someone you know you shouldn't. And you love someone else, that you should, but you're so terrified of loving them because everyone you've loved has met some horrible fate or something like that."

Everyone was staring at Queenie as she broke down. Queenie rubbed the bridge of her nose collecting herself. "Anyways, this has nothing to do with Mrs. Driscoll and the rats and the Mindflayer. So, if these events, the Sauna Test and Mrs. Driscoll's fit, coincide then-"

"That proves it," Nancy interrupted shooting Queenie a sympathetic look. "That proves my theory."

"She's flayed," Mike said with a glance at Queenie. "Just like Billy."

"Flayed?" Jonathan asked tearing his eyes from his friend, who was finally calming down again.

"The Mind Flayer," Mike explained. "He flays people. Takes over their mind. Once they do that, they basically become him."

"If there are two flayed-" Lucas began.

"We have to assume there are more," Will finished.

"Heather," Elle said suddenly. "Billy was doing something to her. She was scared. She was screaming. Bad screams."

"What's a good scream?" Lucas asked.

"Max said-" Elle began to explain before Max cut her off. "Doesn't matter."

Queenie snorted with laughter covering her face as she fell into laughter. "Max!" Queenie put her hands in front of her face in a prayer position, laughter still showing in her eyes. "We need to have a talk, young lady."

"I'm sorry," Nancy said ignoring Queenie. "I'm lost. Who is Heather?"

"She's a lifeguard at the pool," Max replied.

"Heather Holloway?" Nancy asked in surprise.

Elle nodded.

Jonathan and Nancy looked at each other saying. "Tom!"

"What?" Queenie asked standing up as they started heading towards the door. "Who?"

"Our boss at the paper," Jonathan explained. "He was acting... strange."

Nancy grabbed the keys to the Wheeler's station wagon which she, Jonathan, Lucas, Elle, and Max piled into. "Follow us." Nancy said to Queenie who nodded.

Will and Mike ran to Queenie's truck to get in as she moved a few things from the front to the bed. She started the truck up when the boys were in and tore out of the Wheeler's drive following Nancy.

They stood at the Holloway's door trying the doorbell a few times. There was no answer.

"We'll have to break in," Queenie said scouting the windows.

Elle unlocked the door and swung it open before Queenie could even decide which window to break.

"Okay," Queenie said pushing through the others and walking in, one hand on the pistol at her hip.

"Tom? Heather?" Nancy called. It didn't look like anyone was home. A lamp was on and one of the rugs was bunched up like something had been dragged along with it.

"Jesus, it's freezing," Max said.

There was some sort of smell in the air that Queenie couldn't quite place. It didn't smell appetizing though.

"Do you guys smell that?" Nancy asked.

"The overwhelming smell of cleaner?" Queenie asked. "It's-" she gagged. "It's gonna make me sick." They turned the corner into the kitchen to see every type of chemical cleaner out in a mess on the counters.

"Oh god," Nancy said covering her nose before stepping closer. "More chemicals."

Part of the microwave had burned due to the mixed chemicals. The others stepped close to it examining it, but Queenie was staying as far from it as she could.

"You think they're guzzling this shit?" Jonathan asked picking up a broken bottle of cleaner.

"Yeah, either that or they just went on a hell of a cleaning spree," Nancy said.

Queenie stepped away from the others going back to the rug that had been messed up. She bent down to investigate it without touching anything. If this thing really was taking over people's minds, she didn't want to give them a reason to incriminate her.

Nancy bent down next to something in the room adjacent to Queenie. She reached out to touch something on the rug in the room catching Queenie's attention from where she saw it out of the corner of her eye.

"Don't touch anything," Queenie yelled stopping Nancy from touching the stain on the rug. "If this thing is taking over minds, it can easily take over police departments or governments. Everyone else has a reason for their fingerprints to be on the crime scene. We don't. Don't let them incriminate you."

Queenie bent down beside Nancy who said. "It's blood. Yesterday," Nancy turned to Jonathan. "Tom had a bandage on his forehead."

Jonathan nodded in agreement.

They looked at the wine bottle which Queenie carefully rolled over with her talons. There was a blood stain on the wine bottle as well. "Someone attacked him with this."

That's when they noticed the rug that Queenie had been inspecting earlier. They followed where it led to the hallway then down the hallway where they saw another blood stain on the carpet leading to the garage.

Jonathan bent down to investigate the rope on the floor. "They must have tied them up. They must have taken them somewhere."

"Mrs. Driscoll," Nancy said getting their attention again. "She kept saying... I have to go back. What if the flaying, it's taking place somewhere else? There must be a place where all this started, right? A source."

"Somewhere he didn't want me to see," Elle said.

"If we can find the source," Nancy said. "Then maybe we can stop him. Or at least stop it from spreading or doing whatever the hell he's doing with those chemicals."

"How do we find it?" Elle asked.

"Mrs. Driscoll," Will said. "If she wants to go back so badly, why don't we let her?"

Suddenly something clicked in Queenie's mind and she mumbled. "I almost hit Billy with my car."

"What?" Jonathan asked.

Queenie turned to Max saying louder. "I almost hit your brother with my dad's car." They all looked at her confused. "On my way back from New York, I almost hit Billy with my car!"

"Don't sound so excited about it," Max said shooting her a glare.

Queenie shook her head. "No, no, no, not like that. He... he was standing in the middle of the road. He-he looked terrified. He had... a gash on his head. He was... covered in sweat and grime. He... his car... there was something wrong with his car. He... it's almost... it was like, he didn't know where he was. He... he told me... he told me to stay away from him. I thought it was because of the breakup, but maybe... maybe he was trying to protect me. Maybe the Mind Flayer hadn't fully taken him over yet.. Maybe it was a warning. He... he was beyond terrified. The only time he gets like that is... well I can't say, I promised I wouldn't."

"Queenie," Nancy stepped closer to the older woman grabbing her hands to stop them which had been flying throughout her entire speech. "Where did you almost hit him?"

Queenie's wild brown eyes found Nancy's. "He-he was... in the middle of the road. He was... he was by a phone booth at the edge of town! Maybe he really was in trouble! It has to be somewhere around that!" Queenie headed towards the garage door. "Y'all go see Mrs. Driscoll! I'll go scout the area around that phone booth. We'll meet at the Mind Flayer's headquarters."

"Whoa! Queenie," Jonathan yelled getting Queenie to stop briefly. "You can't go there alone."

Queenie sighed. "I won't go in without y'all." She held up the walkie-talkie. "I'll call if I find anything." With that, Queenie ran out of the Holloway's house to her truck and tore off towards the edge of Hawkins.

Queenie parked her truck by the phone booth. She bent down on the

road noticing the rubber marks from Billy's tires where he had abruptly stopped. She held the walkie-talkie in one hand, her Nikon camera around her neck, and the pistol at her hip. Queenie took a picture of the tire marks, the phone booth, and the area around it. She began walking down the road in the direction, she assumed that Billy's car had come from that night, the opposite of what she had been driving.

She took pictures of the woods around her as she followed the road. Finally, she came to a decrepit warehouse. There were tire marks on the road next to it and in the parking lot as well. These tire marks spun as if someone lost control of their car. She took a picture of it.

"Billy was hurt that night," Queenie mumbled to herself.

She noticed scuff marks on pole that held a sign a few feet away. She bent down beside it seeing glass and metal with blue paint on.

"Billy's car," she mumbled. "He had to crash. So..."

She turned to the ominous building. She took a deep breath walking towards it. She stepped inside the building hearing some sort of heavy breathing. There were stairs leading to a basement. She went to them and peaked down, against her better judgement.

Queenie stopped taking a deep breath. Something shot up at her. She immediately pulled out the pistol and shot at it. The tentacle type thing backed away in pain, Queenie took this moment to run as fast as she could. She turned back firing at it a few more times before making it out of the building.

She fiddled with the walkie-talkie. "Guys!" she yelled. "Do you copy? I found it. I-"

"Queenie?" Will said through the walkie-talkie.

"I found it," she said out of breath running through the woods towards her truck.

"You found it?" Will asked.

"I found the Mind Flayer," she said. "I found it's base. Where are

y'all?" She finally arrived at her truck getting in the safety of it; panicking as she tried to start it.

"We just made it to the hospital," Will said. "Jonathan and Nancy just went up to see Mrs. Driscoll."

"Stay right there," Queenie said. "I'm on my way." And then the communication went dead.

Steve, Robin, Dustin, and Erica had found their way through the Russian base the elevator led to towards the radio room. They just had to make it past a few more guards, and they would be able to contact the surface for rescue.

Steve peaked out around their hiding spot seeing that the guards had left. "Okay, clear," he led them towards the radio room. "Clear, come on, let's go."

"Okay," Robin said. "That was close."

"Too close," Dustin added.

"Relax," Steve said, glancing back at them. "Alright? Relax. Nobody saw..."

They turned the corner to see a room full of people that provided no way for them to sneak past.

"Shit!" Steve exclaimed as they dove behind a tool chest. "Jesus!"

"Red Dawn," Dustin exclaimed.

"I saw it," Erica whispered. "First floor, northwest."

"Saw what?" Steve asked not following.

"The comms room," Erica hissed.

"You saw the comms room?" Steve exclaimed in disbelief.

"Correct," Erica said.

"Are you sure?" Dustin asked.

"Positive," Erica said looking back at him. "The door was open for a second, and I saw a bunch of lights and machines and shit in there."

"That could be a hundred different things," Dustin argued.

"I'll take those odds," Robin said reminding Steve of Queenie, who he hoped beyond all possibility is perfectly safe on the surface.

Steve sighed shaking his head to clear his head of thoughts of his best friend's safety. He had three people right beside him that he had to worry about the safety of.

They peaked out at the busy room.

"Alright," Steve said as they all dove back into their hiding spot. "We're gonna move fast, we're gonna stay low. Okay?"

"Okay," Robin said. They followed Steve from hiding spot to hiding spot finally making it to the comms room without being spotted.

Steve closed the door quietly not noticing the radio operator that the others did. He turned around to see a man turn to see them ripping his headphones off. He stood up reaching for his gun.

"Tread lightly," Robin said in Russian putting her hand out to stop him. "Tread lightly!"

"Who are you?" The man asked in Russian.

Robin pointed to herself speaking in Russian. "Silver cat... Silver cat."

The man shook his head speaking in Russian again. "I don't understand."

Robin looked at Steve nervously before saying in Russian. "China?"

The man scoffed at her reaching for his gun again.

At this, Steve yelled, lunging at the man and knocking his gun away. The man threw Steve off into the other desk. He swung at Steve, but

Steve dodged it. The man grabbed Steve by the collar and threw him into the desk. He went to slam Steve's head into the desk, but Steve threw his elbow into the man's stomach making the man fall back. Steve grabbed the mic then turned and hit the man with it knocking him into the desk and knocking him out on the floor. Steve panted taking in deep breaths and ran a hand through his hair.

"Dude!" Dustin yelled excitedly. "You did it!" He pointed at Steve. "You won a fight!"

"Jeez..." Steve mumbled looking down at the knocked out Russian.

"Wait until we tell Queenie," Dustin said.

Steve chuckled at him.

Dustin ran over stealing the man's keycard.

"What are you doing?" Erica asked.

"Getting us our ticket out of here," Dustin said as Robin ran off upstairs to an area connected to the room.

"You want to walk all the way back?" Erica asked in disbelief.

"Well, we can hang out for a little bit," Dustin said sarcastically, "Relax, have a picnic maybe."

"Have a picnic?" Erica exclaimed. "We came here for the radio."

"This plan is way better," Dustin argued. "If I knew Steve could knock out a Russian, that would've been our plan in the first place."

Robin walked up the stairs following some strange low pulsing sound. She looked through the door to see some bright laser type thing drilling into the wall. She ran back down interrupting their argument. "Guys!" They all turned to her. "There's something up there."

They followed up into a viewing room where they saw the device that Dustin and Steve knew exactly what it was doing. The Russians were trying to open the gate to the Upside Down. "Holy shit," Dustin whispered.

Queenie arrived in the hospital quickly finding the kids. She tossed Will her walkie-talkie. "That thing's out of batteries. Do any of you kids have a replacement?"

Will nodded opening his bag and looking for batteries.

Queenie walked up to the receptionist who was on the phone. The receptionist put her phone down looking up at her annoyed.

Queenie smiled. "Hi, what room is Mrs. Driscoll?"

"What are you? Part of the extended family too?" the receptionist asked. "There are already two people up there."

Queenie leaned closer to the reception desk sliding her mother's badge across it as discreetly as she could. "No, ma'am. I'm a federal officer." The woman's eyes widened seeing the marshal's badge. "I'm undercover. Mrs. Driscoll is the last living witness in a case I'm studying, and if I don't talk to her immediately, a mass murderer might walk free."

The woman nodded before telling Queenie the room and returning her mother's badge. Queenie nodded in thanks and headed towards the room, electing for some reason, she couldn't explain to take the stairs.

Queenie burst through the doors of the stairs, seeing Nancy stumbling away from a menacing looking blond man and screaming. "Help!"

"Nan!" Queenie pulled the pistol from her holster and shooting at the man who took the shot and kept walking towards the women.

"Nancy Drew has a friend," the man smirked.

Nancy grabbed Queenie's hand and ran through the hall away from the man. Nancy grabbed the fire extinguisher and dove into a vacant room.

They closed all the curtains hiding in the middle of them. "Are they played?" Queenie asked.

"Yeah," Nancy whispered out of breath. "We used to work together."

"I found it," Queenie whispered back. "I found the place it started."

"Where?" Nancy asked.

"Survive the moment, Nance," Queenie said wiping away a tear that fell from Nancy's eye.

They heard the door click open, and they held their breath. "Yoo-hoo," the man said. "Nancy Drew, where are you? Where's your friend too?"

Queenie motioned Nancy with her eyes as the man opened the first curtain. Nancy dove behind the third curtain. As he opened the second curtain, Queenie cocked the pistol before putting it back in the holster for now. As he moved onto the next curtain, Nancy dove to the second one.

"Marco," the man said.

Queenie smirked. He opened the final curtain being faced with Queenie talons up. "Polo!" both women said. Queenie scratched his face as Nancy brought the fire extinguisher down on his head. Nancy hit him again with the fire extinguisher knocking him into the surgical table. Queenie pulled out the pistol and emptied the rounds into his head until he didn't move again.

"We did it," Queenie mumbled.

Nancy dropped the fire extinguisher hugging Queenie. "We did it!"

"Where's Jon?" Queenie asked. "We have to get him and the kids out of here."

Their celebration and plans were cut short when the man's body began to boil and bubble like it was burning up. It exploded and turned into this disgusting goo that crawled away into the hall. They followed it. Jonathan was across the hall following his own goo. It met with the other goo and melded together into the shape of a monster. The lights flickered out completely. When the emergency lights came on the monster screeched at them.

23. Chapter 6: E Plubrius Unum

Steve and Dustin shared a worried look. "The gate," they said. They rushed Robin and Erica out of the room. Explaining quickly that this thing was dangerous, and they had to get out of here.

"I don't understand," Robin said. "You've seen this before?"

"Not exactly," Steve said.

"Then what, exactly?" Robin asked.

"All you need to know is that it's bad," Dustin said.

Steve wished that Queenie was here. She was always good at explaining things to people in high pressure situations because she just told them. "It's really bad," he added.

"Like, end-of-the-human-race-as-we-know-it kind of bad," Dustin said.

"And you know about this, how?" Robin asked glaring at him.

"Um, Steve?" Erica asked interrupting the argument. "Where's your Russian friend?"

Steve looked down to see the radio operator gone before alarms began to go off. "Shit," Steve ran to the door looking out to see the man telling the guards where they're at.

"Halt!" the guards yelled in Russian. "Halt!"

"Shit," Steve slammed the door holding it for a bit. "Go, go, go, go, go!"

"Shit," Dustin exclaimed as they ran back up towards the observation room. In the panic, they ran down through the room that the gate was being opened in. They stared at the laser opening the gate that blocked their way. Dustin kept yelling "Holy shit!" over and over again.

Steve noticed more stairs down and yelled. "This way!" He shoved a

worker out of the way almost running right into guards. "Oh, shit! Oh, shit!" He pushed over barrels into the guards.

"Whoa," Erica yelled.

"Come on," Steve yelled leading them to another room off the gate floor. "Go, go, go, go, go!"

"Come on!" Robin urged Dustin who had fallen behind a bit. Robin burst into a door followed by the kids and Steve. "Come on, quick!"

"Hold the door," Steve yelled shutting it and throwing his weight against it. "Robin."

"Shit," Dustin said seeing no way out.

"Help me," Steve yelled at Robin. "Come on." Robin threw her weight on the door with Steve reminding him of when he and Queenie had done the same in the bus against the demo-dogs.

"Here," Erica yelled finding a grate they could escape through. "Come on, let's go!"

"Come on!" Dustin said looking back at Steve and Robin.

"Go," Steve yelled. "Just get out of here!"

"Go, come on, now!" Dustin yelled jumping into the grate.

"No!" Steve yelled. "Just go get Queenie! Get some help, okay?"

Dustin looked back at them.

"What are you doing?" Steve yelled.

"Go!" Robin and Steve yelled.

"I won't forget you!" Dustin yelled back.

"Go!" They yelled again.

Dustin closed the gate right as the Russians burst the door open knocking Steve and Robin away from it. They put their hands up in

surrender.

"Shit," Nancy whispered.

"Nancy! Queenie!" Jonathan yelled.

Queenie fumbled in her jacket for more bullets for the pistol.

"Run!" Jonathan yelled.

Nancy pulled on Queenie's arm trying the stairs but something was blocking it. "Damn!"

Queenie wasn't dealing with this thing twice in one day. She threw herself at the door and it opened a bit more. Finally, it opened allowing the two women to run down the stairs to the third floor which was currently under renovation. They ran through the empty hallways looking for anything; they could use to defend themselves.

"Fuck," Queenie mumbled as they ran. "I'm sorry, Nan. This is my fault. I know where it lives. It knows I know."

"Que," Nancy said. "We can assign blame later." Nancy grabbed Queenie's arm pulling her into one of the rooms. She slammed the door hoping the monster couldn't get through it. Queenie reloaded her pistol cocking it.

"Nance," Queenie pointed to the table full of construction tools. Nancy nodded picking up the circular saw that sat there.

The monster began to ooze through the crack under the door. "Oh my god," Nancy mumbled. "Jonathan..."

Queenie shot at the blob, but it just avoided her bullets. "Fuck this," Queenie mumbled putting the pistol back into its holster. She bent down by the monster digging her talons into it and throwing a chunk of it away from it.

It didn't matter that much the monster just kept bringing itself back together.

"Nancy," Queenie said. "If I don't make it. Tell my dad, it's what Mom would've wanted. And tell Steve, I should've listened to him." Queenie stepped in front of Nancy swinging the sawed-off into her hands. "Let's go, fucker." She cocked the shotgun as the monster formed in front of her and shot it in its screeching mouth of teeth. The monster swung out at Queenie slamming her into a wall much as Billy had done the night before.

The creature advanced on Nancy making her cower into the floor as she had found the saw wasn't working. Queenie shook off the pain and cocked the shotgun shooting the creature again. This caused it to turn from Nancy to Queenie. It came closer and closer, but Queenie just kept shooting it.

The door burst open revealing Eleven and the other kids causing the monster to turn to them.

"Jesus!" Mike exclaimed.

"What the fuck!?" Max yelled.

Queenie crawled over beside Nancy hiding from the creature as Elle threw into the wall then the other wall. She threw the monster into the ceiling then to the floor. And, finally, out the window to the street below where it melted back into goo and headed towards the base.

"Go!" Elle yelled and the kids ran away.

"Nancy!" Jonathan yelled running over to his girlfriend to check on her. "Are you okay?" Nancy nodded. "Are you okay?" Nancy nodded again.

"I'm good too, Jon," Queenie said sarcastically.

Jonathan shot her a sympathetic look.

Queenie snickered. "Don't worry about it. I'm only joking. I'd check on my girlfriend first too." She started out of the building adding under her breath. "If I had one."

They ran out of the hospital watching the thing go down a drain. "It's

going back to base," Queenie said. "Which, luckily, I know where is. Unluckily though, we'll die if we go there."

"I don't know what it was called," Queenie exclaimed. "I didn't think that was important!" They were in the Hopper's cabin asking Queenie about the base she had found.

"Well, you could lead us to it, right?" Mike asked.

"We can't take on this thing alone," Queenie said. "We need an arsenal. It's huge! Only one tentacle came after me, and I'm only alive because it wanted to see where I was going."

"But you know where it is?" Nancy asked turning to her.

"Sort of," Queenie answered frustrated. "I was running for my life, so things got a little fuzzy there."

"I could," Elle interrupted them. "I could look for the memory."

"Elle," Queenie looked up at her. "No. Absolutely not. I have a mental illness. My brain doesn't function like everyone else's. Who knows what you'd see in there?"

"Queenie," Max said looking at her. "We have to try something."

"Well, try something else," Queenie snapped standing up. "Because I've seen an awful lot of shit, and she doesn't deserve to see what I have at her age. Hell, even I didn't deserve to see it at the age I did." Queenie stormed off trying her walkie-talkie with new batteries to contact Dustin, Steve, and Robin.

The others shared a scared look before going to plan B. Elle used her powers to look for the flayed while Nancy's tried calling every place that may have a connection with the chemicals or the rats.

After well over half an hour, Mike said. "It can't be good for her to be in there for this long."

"Mike, you need to relax," Max said.

"What if she gets brain damage or something?" Mike snapped.

"Oh shit," Lucas said. "Is that, like, a real thing?"

"No," Max said, shaking her head. "It's not. He made it up. Mike doesn't know what the hell he's talking about."

"Oh, and you do?" Mike accused.

"No, I..." Max began as Queenie tuned it out messing with her walkie-talkie again.

"Dusty," She said in it. "Do you copy?" She sighed getting no answer. She hadn't gotten one yet, and it was starting to really scare her. What if they were dead? "Robin, are you there?" Queenie sighed letting a tear fall from her eye. "Stevie, if you're there. I... I should've told you before. You are the best best friend I've ever had. You... you are not only there for me when I need you, but even when I don't want you around. And... I-I love you. I'm not sure how, but I think it might be romantically, you big idiot. If you die in that stupid room, I'm gonna kill you."

Queenie turned the walkie-talkie off joining Jonathan and Will at the table.

"Who's next?" Nancy asked hanging up the phone.

"There is no next," Jonathan said. "Unless you want to start calling random people's homes."

"It doesn't make sense," Nancy said.

"What part of any of this makes sense?" Jonathan asked.

"There's a pattern, okay?" Nancy snapped. "A consistency to their behavior. They've been feeding on these chemicals since this started, and- and what they just stop, out of the blue?"

"It's basic survival of the species instincts," Queenie said.

"What?" Nancy asked turning to her.

"They don't need these chemicals to survive," she said. "It's like a power-up or an extra defense. People don't need guns to live, but why did we create them?"

"To protect ourselves and hunt," Nancy said.

"Exactly," Queenie said. "It's not like we couldn't do both of those things before, but it is much easier now that we have guns. Now we," she gestured to them, "are a threat to the survival of the flayed. We... well Elle knows how to kill them, so that makes her a threat to their survival. So to protect their species and survive, they are going into hiding to protect those that are left until their biggest threat is eliminated."

"You're not saying-" Will started.

Queenie nodded grimly. "It makes sense that they would-"

"Okay, can you guys settle an argument for us?" Max interrupted. "Who do you think should decide Elle's limits? Mike or Eleven?"

"The way that you frame that is just bullshit," Mike complained.

"It's not bullshit, Mike!" Max yelled. "This is your whole problem. And it's also precisely the reason why she dumped your ass."

"Elle dumped you?" Nancy asked in disbelief.

"Yeah, because they're conspiring against me," Mike said gesturing to Max and Queenie.

"That is bullshit, Mike," Queenie snapped. "I am a grown woman who is worried sick about her friend, roommate, and one of your best friends who she hasn't heard from in over twenty-four hours. They're probably being interrogated somewhere about something they have no idea about. And I'm not there with them because you kids called me, and I can't say no. It's why I make shitty decisions." Queenie took a deep breath calming herself down. "Now, Mike, I understand worried because I'm there too, okay? Dustin is, oddly enough, like my son. Like all of you kids are. Robin is honestly the first girl around my age that I've gotten close to since Nancy, and I really need that. And Steve... well, he's Steve, but..." She smiled to herself. "If he

doesn't survive, who am I supposed to get a cat with?"

Mike looked at her confused.

"Besides, Mike," Max said shooting Queenie a grin that told her Max knew what that pause was about. "Elle is her own person fully capable of making her own decisions."

"She's risking life for no reason," Mike argued.

"For no reason?" Nancy snapped. "Mike, the flayed are out there doing God knows what."

"Killing, flaying..." Lucas offered.

"Transforming into monsters," Will added.

"And Elle's not stupid," Nancy continued. "She knows her abilities better than any of us."

"Exactly," Max nodded in agreement. "Thank you."

"And she is her own person," Nancy continued.

"Exactly," Max agreed.

"With her own free will," Nancy finished.

"Exactly," Max said. "Elle has saved the world twice, and Mike still doesn't trust her."

"You wanna talk about trust, really?" Mike snapped. "After you made Eleven spy on us?"

"Wait, what?" Lucas asked.

"Oh," Mike continued in anger. "She didn't tell you this?"

"No," Lucas exclaimed.

"Your girlfriend used Elle's powers to spy on us," Mike said.

"No, no, no, I did not make her," Max hissed. "It was her idea."

Queenie groaned rubbing her temples. "Steve and I should divide our parenting duties better. We both can't just help one and expect our children to behave obviously."

"And why are we even talking about this, seriously?" Max snapped ignoring Queenie's mumblings.

"Yeah," Will agreed. "Who cares?"

"I care," Lucas snapped.

"Yeah," Mike snapped. "I guess girlfriends don't lie, they spy!"

"We were just joking around," Max defended.

"Children, children, children," Queenie clapped not getting Mike and Max's attention who continued to argue. Finally having enough Queenie yelled at them in Italian. "Children if you don't stop arguing, I will ground you all from ever seeing each other until I move to Chicago at the end of the month. That includes grounding Elle from spying on you with her powers and contact through the radios. Now shut up!"

Everyone shut up looking at Queenie.

"I'm just trying to demonstrate how careless Max is with Elle's powers," Mike argued somehow less phased than the others by Queenie's rant in Italian. "In fact, how careless all of you are. You're treating her like some kind of machine when she's not a machine, and I don't want her to die looking for the flayed when they've obviously vanished off the face of the Earth. So can we please just come up with a new plan because I love her, and I can't lose her again."

Everyone looked at him surprised even Mike looked surprised at his own words. Queenie snickered into her hand mumbling in Italian. "Wait until I tell Steven."

Elle stepped out of her room making everyone turn to her. "What's going on?"

"Nothing," Mike said too quickly. "Nothing."

Queenie smirked.

"Just a family discussion," Lucas said.

"Oh," Elle said. "I found him."

"Found who?" Nancy asked.

Elle took a deep breath. "Billy."

Elle was now sat in the main living area looking for Billy with everyone else watching her waiting for, Queenie didn't know, a verdict, maybe? Elle's breathing became rapid, and she pulled the blindfold off her face.

"What's he doing now?" Max asked.

Elle looked back answering. "He's just sitting there... Like he's waiting for something."

Queenie's breath caught in her throat.

Elle went over and got a glass of water.

"And that's not normal, right?" Nancy asked.

"Billy staying in his room on the Fourth of July?" Max said. "No, that's not normal."

"He wants us to find him," Will said.

"Yeah, that's what I'm afraid of," Nancy said. "If we go to Billy, then the rest of the flayed know where we are."

"It's a trap," Mike said. "I agree. We'll be ambushed."

"We won't be surprised," Lucas said. "We'll know that they're coming, and we'll kick their flayed butts."

"You mean Elle will kick their butts," Max corrected.

Queenie bit her lip. She stood up having heard enough. "We won't be ambushed. I will."

"Queenie," Jonathan began to protest.

"Look, I know Billy better than any of you," Queenie said shooting an apologetic look to Max. "I slept with him for six months. We talked all the time. We fell in love with each other. If anyone can get to Billy, it's me."

"Queenie," Will protested. "It's suicide."

"Wouldn't be my first attempt," Queenie said with a sad smile. "I can give y'all directions to the base, and while the flayed come after me, y'all can take Elle to destroy the Mind Flayer. Just like with the demo-dogs, the flayed will be too far away to get back to the Mind Flayer in time to stop you."

"But, Que," Nancy said biting her lip. "You'll be dead."

"A small price to pay to save millions," Queenie said.

"You don't need to sacrifice yourself, Que," Mike said.

Queenie smiled at him. "It's what Dom would've wanted."

"I'm sorry," Jonathan said cutting in. "I know you knew your twin brother better than anyone, but I don't think when Dominique sacrificed himself to keep you alive he wanted you to do it a few years later."

Queenie opened her mouth to protest but she was interrupted by Elle. "Queenie, you know the source. Do you think you could tell me?"

Queenie bit her lip, trying to remember the names of the streets. "I could take you to it, but... it's suicide if we don't have a distraction. Besides... if we kill the Mind Flayer then we kill the flayed too. And I'm not losing Billy too. I don't care if he abused me. I still care about him, and I'm not losing him or any of the other people that have been turned into the flayed. You have to let me try to get to him."

"Queenie," Elle said putting a hand on her arm. "Please..."

Queenie bit her lip and glanced at Mike. She slowly nodded her head and held out her hand. "Look for it... Look for it in my memory."

Elle slowly nodded before sitting down with Queenie in front of her. Queenie took Elle's hand who closed the blindfold over her eyes and began the dig into Queenie's mind.

Elle fell onto the ground outside of a decrepit factory building. Queenie was bent down looking at something on the ground. Elle bent looking over her shoulder to see glass. The glass rocketed her back.

She landed on dry grass outside a little house. A woman with short dark hair and two children with dark brown hair stood beside it looking at where a window had shattered.

"Don't worry, Nicky," the woman said. "We'll tell Papá, and he'll get it fixed."

"Mamma," the boy, Nicky, said. "I'm sorry. It was an accident."

"I know," the woman said, smiling at the boy.

"I didn't break anything," the girl teased Nicky.

Nicky stuck his tongue out at the girl. The woman laughed smiling at the girl as she led the two children inside.

As the woman's smile turned to Elle, the scene shifted again. The room was dark and musty. There was a horrible smell that Elle couldn't place.

"Queenie!" the woman exclaimed running towards Elle who had an almost dead Queenie behind her.

The woman, who Elle now understood to be Loreta Calabrese, moved towards Queenie before her entire head exploded from behind covering Queenie's face with pieces of brain and blood.

"Mamma!" Queenie yelled. A dirty, heavysset, tall man smirked down at Queenie. Queenie dived for her mother's sawed-off shotgun and pointed it at the man's leg shooting it.

With the shot, the scene shifted again. Elle now found herself in the Byers's house, the demogorgon was trapped in a beartrap and on fire. Nancy, Jonathan, Steve, and Queenie stood there watching the monster burn. Jonathan began spraying it down with a fire extinguisher. When they noticed the monster was gone, Queenie slammed her hand on the wall yelling. "Goddammit! We almost had that fucker!" The others gave Queenie a concerned look.

As Elle met Steve's concerned look, the scene shifted to a hospital room.

"Queen," Steve mumbled looking down at Queenie who was badly injured and unresponsive though awake. "Did you really have to wait until he almost killed you?"

Steve bent over her and gave her a kiss on the cheek. "I'll never let him hurt you again, not as long as I'm alive."

The scene shifted again. It was that dirty, dark, smelly room again. A boy probably only a little bit older than Elle was bent in pain on the floor beside a younger dark-haired Queenie. Elle assumed this boy was Dominique. The man from earlier hit Dominique with something that looked like a whip making the boy cry out in pain. The man climbed on top of Dominique making the scene shift again.

Billy was on top of Queenie in her bedroom. Neither of them had a shirt on making Elle slightly uncomfortable. A banging downstairs made fear flash through Billy's eyes which caused the scene to shift again.

Billy stood terrified in the middle of the road. Queenie was talking to him trying to make sure he was okay. This was back on track to what Elle wanted to find out. Billy walked towards his car making Queenie look at the phone booth.

The scene shifted to Queenie looking around the phone booth for tire marks then followed a trail along the edge of the woods.

As Queenie walked along the woods began to shift to different woods, Queenie's hair grew darker. Dominique looking happy and unbeaten walked beside her. The two were walking down the trail talking

about a birthday celebration of some kind. A truck pulled up beside them on the other side of the road. The man in the driver's seat wished them a happy birthday and insisted they come over for a second. Dominique thanked the man and dragged Queenie against her will to the vehicle. Before Elle understood what this scene was, someone jumped out of the truck bed and Queenie's vision and the memory went hazy then dark.

Elle gasped ripping the blindfold off her face.

"Did you find it?" Lucas asked.

Elle shook her head looking to Queenie who had tears streaming down her face. She had relived every memory that Elle had went through.

"Her mind," Elle mumbled. "It's... muddy. It's like loops not linear."

Queenie ran from the room to Elle's bedroom breaking down away from the watchful eyes of everyone else.

Robin and Steve sat tied together in the interrogation room the Russians had brought them to, waiting for the drug they injected them with to take effect. Steve's face was still badly injured from the Russians beating it every time he gave an unsatisfactory answer, but he was starting to become numb to the pain.

"Honestly," Steve said. "I don't really feel anything. Do you?"

"I mean, I... I feel fine," Robin replied. "I feel normal."

"Yeah I feel- I feel fine," Steve agreed. "I kinda feel good."

They laughed.

"Wanna know a secret?" Robin asked laughing.

"What?" Steve asked chuckling.

"I like it, too!" Robin said laughing even more. They laughed. "I feel

good," Robin added.

"Morons," Steve said chuckling. "They messed up the drug."

"They messed it up!" Robin exclaimed giggling.

"Morons!" They began calling. "Hey Morons!"

"Whoa-oh!" Steve yelled laughing still.

"Oh, no," Robin said eyes widening. "There's definitely something wrong with us."

"Something's wrong," Steve agreed.

The door opened and the Russians returned including the doctor and the general. The general stared down at Steve as the doctor got out his tools of torture.

"Would now be a good time to tell you, that I don't like doctors?" Robin asked.

"Let's try this again, yes?" the general said. "Who do you work for?"

"Scoops," Steve said chuckling. "Scoops Ahoy." Robin laughed as well.

"How did you find us?" the general asked.

"Totally by accident," he chuckled.

The general looked at the doctor and said in Russian. "More lies."

The doctor shrugged and picked up one of his tools walking over to Steve.

"What is that shiny little toy?" Steve asked.

"Where you going with that, doc?" Robin asked.

"Whoa, whoa," Steve protested as the doctor grabbed his hand and prepared the tool to pull off his nail. "Hey, hey. Wait! No! Wait! Wait! Whoa!"

"There was a code!" Robin exclaimed. "We heard a code!"

The doctor stopped and the general stepped around to Robin. "Code? What code?"

"The week is long. The silver cat feeds when blue meets yellow in the west. Blah, blah, blah," Robin said. "You broadcast that stupid spy shit all over town, and we picked it up on our Cerebro, and we cracked it in a day. A day! You think you're so smart, but a couple of kids who scoop ice cream for a living cracked your code in a day, and now, people know you're here."

"Who knows we are here, suka?" the general asked angrily.

"Uh, well, Dustin knows," Steve said. "And Queen- Queenie knows."

"Hey, Steve," Robin snapped a warning at him.

"Yeah, Dustin Henderson he knows," Steve said.

"Steve!" Robin protested for him to shut up.

"And Queenie Calabrese, the prettiest girl in Hawkins, she knows," Steve said. "And the best part-"

"STEVE!" Robin yelled slamming her foot down.

"Dustin Henderson," the general smiled. "Queenie Calabrese. This Dustin is your small, curly haired friend, no?"

"Oh yeah," Steve agreed. "Curly haired. Great hair. Small. Kind of like a 'fro. Yeah."

"But this Queenie, who is she?" the general asked.

"Oh. Absolutely brilliant. A bit of a nerd. Colorful hair but somehow takes really good care of it. Dresses like a punk. Acts like one too. Speaks Italian. Has really pretty brown eyes. Drinks tea when she gets upset. Recently stopped smoking. Really fun-"

"STEVE!" Robin snapped again.

"What?" Steve hissed at her.

"Where are they?" the general asked.

"They're long gone, you big asshole." Steve snickered. "Dust's probably calling Hopper, and Hopper's calling the US cavalry. And Queen's probably called her mom's friends in the US Marshals." He laughed. "They're gonna come in here, commando-style, guns-a-blazin', and kick your sorry asses back to Russia. You're gonna be two pieces of toast."

Robin and Steve fell into more laughter.

"Is that so?" the general asked.

"Yeah," Steve said making him and Robin laugh again.

The general looked up at the doctor and laughed as well.

An alarm began blaring in the facility. Steve looked at the general smugly.

Dustin burst in brandishing the electrified weapon Erica had found and stuck it in the doctor's chest. The doctor fell unconscious to the floor.

"Hey! Henderson!" Steve exclaimed happily. "That's crazy. I was just talking about you."

"Oh my god!" Robin exclaimed.

"Get ready to run," Dustin said throwing the straps off.

Queenie took a deep breath sipping the tea she had made. Elle was now looking for the location of the Mind Flayer in Billy's mind since they couldn't safely navigate Queenie's. Queenie felt bad about it. She wished she could be more help, but her mind is a minefield even for the most navigated in it, her.

"NO!" Elle yelled ripping the blindfold off and making Queenie jump.

Elle turned to Mike who wrapped her in a hug. "Elle, you're okay. It's- It's okay. Elle."

Elle sobbed into Mike's arms.

Queenie knew what this was. This was the end. No matter what, they had to kill that thing. Even if it meant killing Billy to do so.

24. Chapter 7: The Bite

"He said," Elle was explaining what had happened to her in Billy's mind. Queenie was listening absentmindedly still recovering from her experience with Elle. "He was building something. That it was all for me."

"Building something..." Max said. "Is he talking about the flayed?"

"He must be," Nancy said.

"So, he's building an army just like we thought," Lucas said.

"Yeah," Mike agreed. "But he's not building this army to spread."

"He's building it to stop Eleven," Will said.

"Elle's the only one that can kill him or at least incapacitate his army," Queenie said tracing the rim of her mug. "So if he gets rid of Elle..."

"Game over," Lucas said.

Queenie shrugged in agreement taking another drink of her tea.

"He also said," Elle took a deep breath. "He's going to kill all of you."

"Ha!" Queenie lifted her mug. "Wouldn't be the first time he's tried to kill me. Let's see how well he succeeds a second time." She took a sip of her tea.

"It's not Billy, Que," Jonathan reminded her.

"Might as well be," Queenie snapped resting her mug on the counter she was leaning on. "Look, I've had a lot of people try to kill me over the years. And I'm still kicking, 19 years strong. So the Mind Flayer can try, but I doubt he'll succeed. And if he does," she shrugged. "Guess I'll find out if nonna was right."

Before anyone could ask Queenie what she meant they heard a faint screeching in the distance.

"Do you guys hear that?" Nancy asked.

"It's just the fireworks," Jonathan said.

"Even if it is," Queenie said. "We need to prepare for a fight. That was clearly a threat, and I'm not letting any harm come to Elle or any of the rest of you for that matter."

"Billy," Nancy turned to Elle. "When he told you this, it was here, in this room?"

Elle nodded.

Will slowly reached up to his neck as the chills returned. "He knows we're here."

"Get out," Queenie said.

"What?" Nancy snapped.

"Take the kids, and get out of here," Queenie said. "This thing wants Elle. So Elle and I will stay behind and distract it long enough for you guys to get help."

"Queenie we're not leaving you behind to-" Jonathan protested.

"Jonathan," Queenie interrupted. "I'm not asking. I'm telling. GET THE OTHERS OUT OF HERE, and we'll catch up."

"Where would we even go?" Jonathan asked.

"Loading dock of the mall," Queenie replied. "There's a secret room there guarded by Russians with guns. Last I knew Steve, Dustin, and Robin were trying to get in their through the ducts. That was about noon yesterday. I haven't heard from them since. They'll need rescue."

"Wait, Que, you're not making any sense," Nancy said stopping her.

"Okay, we're fighting a monster from another dimension, and a secret room guarded by Russians where our friends may be trapped doesn't make any sense," Queenie snapped.

"No, the part that makes no sense is you thinking we'd leave you and Elle here to fight an interdimensional monster, alone." Nancy hissed.

"Yeah," Mike agreed. "I'm not leaving Elle."

"If you're going down fighting this thing then so are we," Max said.

"Yeah," Lucas agreed. "We're gonna kick this thing's butt."

"Fine," Queenie said heading towards the door. "But if any of you die, I'm killing you."

They all ran out to grab weapons from the shed and Queenie's truck when they noticed the Mind Flayer tearing through the trees towards the cabin. It was too late to run.

Nancy went out to the shed to grab Hopper's shotgun while Jonathan grabbed the axe. Queenie pulled the bat out of her truck bed where Max had thrown it before they went to the Holloway's. She reloaded the sawed-off shotgun and the pistol. The kids covered the windows with the furniture. The three eldest teenagers walked back into the house now armed.

"Which of you's got the best swing?" Queenie asked before throwing the bat to Max. "Nevermind."

Max caught then took a few practice swings. Mike and Lucas looked at Queenie offended which made her laugh.

"Why do you have that bat anyways?" Nancy asked. "I thought Steve had it."

"Steve did," Queenie replied. "See after graduation, Steve and I were hanging out at the Harrington's, believe it or not, and we might've had a bowl. Anyways, we were using..." Queenie snickered. "We were being stupid." Queenie laughed trying to keep it under control. "We were... batting away cans with it... and I hurt myself, so us... being not in the right state of mind, right? We were like... what if they need the weapons to heal me? Anyways so we threw it in the back of my truck put a bandage on the wound and then went swimming and ate... an entire cake and forgot about it." Queenie fell into laughter.

They looked at her shocked and amused.

"Why do Steve and you hang out? Why do we allow that?" Will asked laughing.

Queenie snickered but shrugged. Queenie composed herself before helping Will move the table up against the back door. "So, we really just Scooby Doo and Shaggying it? Because if memory serves, this never worked out for them."

"Do you have a better plan?" Nancy snapped under her breath.

"I did, but all of you shot my plan down," Queenie snapped glaring at the younger woman.

Nancy shot her a glare backing down a bit when she met Queenie's.

The lamps began shaking ending their glaring contest that Queenie was sure she won. Things in the house began to knock against each other.

"It's close," Will said.

The trees began to crack as the monster continued to stumble through the forest towards the cabin. The mugs began to fall off the wall and break.

Suddenly, as quickly as it started, everything stopped.

"Where'd it go?" Max asked fear in her voice.

After a few bated breaths, a tentacle burst through the wall at them. Max swung at it knocking it towards Queenie who shot it with the sawed-off. It backed away from Queenie and turned to Elle who was protecting the boys. Jonathan swung at it with the axe making it throw him aside. It went after the fallen Jonathan, but Nancy shot at it with Hopper's shotgun making it turn to her. She emptied her rounds on it then backed away in fear as it continued to advance. Queenie shot at it gaining it's attention again. She kept shooting at it until the sawed-off ran out of ammo then she whipped out the pistol as Nancy reloaded the shot-gun. Queenie emptied the barrel into the creature, but it still advanced. Queenie dropped the pistol holding out

her talons in front of her face as a last defence. Nancy shot again at the creature having reloaded the shotgun. She emptied it of it's ammo again before backing up out of defense. It lunged at her screeching but was stopped short by Elle with her powers. Elle forced it back from Nancy before ripping of the mouth of it. The tentacle retreated back through the hole it had created.

"Holy shit," Max said.

Another tentacle burst through the hole towards Elle who stopped it. Then another burst from the other side which Elle stopped as well. Queenie reloaded while Elle dealt with those two creatures. She ripped the mouths off much like she had done with the other one. They retreated as well.

A tentacle burst through the rough of the cabin grabbing Elle by the ankle and dragging her away. Mike grabbed her yelling her name. The kids and Jonathan grabbed onto her helping Mike while Queenie took aim to shoot, and Nancy reloaded hers. There was a silent, unneeded agreement between the two girls to tag team this thing. Queenie shot at the thing until her sawed-off was out of bullets, then Nancy took shots at it with the shotgun. With each shot, the creature retreated in pain, but it wasn't letting go of Elle. Lucas grabbed the discarded axe and hacked off the tentacle that had a hold of Elle. Elle fell back. Mike pulled off the part of the creature that was still attached to her leg. It scurried off. The creature snarled at her as Elle stood up to face it. She screamed as she used her powers to rip it apart.

"Go, go, go!" Nancy yelled.

"Come on, come on, go!" Jonathan added.

"Put Elle in my truck, Mike," Queenie said. "Easier to explain the blood rather than in your mother's hatchback."

Mike nodded carrying Elle to Queenie's truck. The three of them scrambled in, following Nancy down the wooded road.

They pulled in behind Nancy as the grocery store. Mike and Queenie helped Elle in past the broken glass. Nancy found rubbing alcohol and gauze.

"Okay," Nancy said. "Get her down."

"We're gonna need more than that," Queenie said. "First things first, we need water and gloves. Get me tape, antibiotic cream, hydrogen peroxide, and... find me a sewing kit if you can." Nancy gave Queenie a worried look. "Don't worry, Nan, I'm the one going into the medical field."

Will handed Queenie a bottle of water and rubber gloves as they moved Elle's pant leg up to see the deep cut. Queenie took off her talons and riding gloves setting them to the side and slipped on the rubber gloves.

"Oh shit," Max said earning a warning glance from Queenie.

Queenie poured the water over the wound cleansing the area a bit. "We have to cleanse the area only with water until she stops gushing blood."

Max nodded in agreement.

"Once the bleeding has stopped or is at a manageable level," Queenie continued. "Then-"

"We clean, then disinfect, then bandage," Max finished earning an impressed look and nod of approval from Queenie. Everyone else looked at the red-head speechless. "I skateboard. Trust me."

Queenie snickered remembering all the skateboarding injuries she would help Max dress. Queenie pushed a gauze pad down on the wound. "Max, keep pressure on this."

Queenie stepped away from them searching the aisles for a sewing kit or at least a pack of needles and some thread. She smirked as she found an emergency sewing kit. She picked it up hearing a distortion from her backpack. She ran back to where she had left it a few aisles over. She put the sewing kit in her bag pulling out her walkie-talkie. "This is a code red!"

Dustin ran back into the movie theater they had been hiding in to Erica hoping to find batteries for his walkie-talkie, so he could properly talk to Queenie and Mike. "Do you have any batteries? Double-A?"

"Why would I have batteries?" Erica asked.

"I always carry batteries," Dustin said.

"Then what's the problem?" Erica asked shrugging at him.

"I need eight," he said looking down at the walkie-talkie.

"Eight?" Erica asked.

"Shit," Dustin whispered. "Guess we'll have to go to plan B."

"Plan B?" Erica asked still confused. "What's plan B?"

Dustin looked past Erica down the row to see Steve and Robin weren't there. "Where... are they?"

Steve and Robin were outside the theater getting a drink out of the water fountain. "That's amazing," Steve said bending over the water fountain again.

"So, like, I wasn't totally focused in there or anything, but..." Robin said. "I'm pretty sure... that mom was trying to bang her son."

"Wait, wait," Steve said looking at her. "The hot chick was Alex P. Keaton's mom?"

"Yeah," Robin said. "I'm pretty sure."

"But they were the same age," Steve said getting another drink of water.

"No, but he went back in time," Robin argued.

Steve snickered. "Then why is it called Back to the Future?"

"He has to go back to the future because he's in the past," Robin said. "So, the future is actually the present, which is his time."

"Wh...what?" Steve asked still not understanding it.

"No, no, it's my turn," Robin complained pushing him away from the water fountain. "You've had enough."

Steve stumbled away looking up at the brightly lit ceiling. "Wow..." The lights on the ceiling seemed to dance before his eyes. "Hey Robin. You gotta check this out."

Robin walked over to him looking up at the dancing lights.

"Check this..." Steve slurred pointing at the ceiling. "This... the ceiling, it's beautiful."

"Oh wow," Robin said as the color of the light blended together more. She chuckled turning around while looking up at it. "Oh..."

The dancing ceiling began to make them dizzy. They ran to the nearest bathroom vomiting everything they had left in their stomachs including the last of that drug the Russian's had given them.

Steve groaned leaning back into the wall.

Robin, who was laying on her back staring up with her feet propped on the cubicle wall, said. "The ceiling stopped spinning for me. Is it still spinning for you?"

Steve looked up. "Holy shit. No. You think we puked it all up?"

"Maybe. Ask me something," Robin said before mocking a Russian accent. "Interrogate me."

Steve snickered. "Okay. Interrogate you. Sure. Um... when was the last time you, uh, peed your pants?"

"Today," Robin said.

"What?" Steve asked.

"When the Russian doctor took out the bone saw," Robin continued.

"Oh my God," Steve laughed.

"It was just a little bit though," Robin admitted laughing.

"Yeah," Steve mumbled. "It's definitely still in her system."

Robin laughed. "Oh... All right, my turn."

"Okay," Steve agreed. "Hit me."

"Have you... ever been in love?" Robin asked.

"Yep," Steve admitted. "Nancy Wheeler. First semester, senior year." He imitated a gunshot to the heart.

"Oh my God," Robin said. "She's such a priss."

"Hm," Steve thought back on his time with Nancy. "Turns out, not really."

Robin scoffed. "Are you still in love with Nancy?"

"No," Steve admitted.

"Why not?" Robin asked.

"I think it's because I found someone who's a little bit better for me," Steve smiled thinking of a certain girl. He chuckled. "It's crazy. Ever since Dustin got home, he's been saying 'You know you gotta find your Suzie. You gotta find your Suzie'."

"Wait, who's Suzie?" Robin asked.

"It's some girl from camp, I guess his girlfriend," Steve said. "To be honest with you, I'm not 100% sure she's even real." He chuckled. "But that's not- that's not really the point. That doesn't matter. The point is this girl, you know, the one that I like, she hated me when she first met me. But..." Steve sighed chuckling slightly. "She somehow still saw me as a good person, even when I was a total douchebag to her and her friends. When we were enemies, she's the

only person that acted like a friend to me. We became friends out of the blue, simply because I asked her to start over. I promised her to be less of an asshole too." They chuckled. "And being her best friend is the best decision, I've ever made. She's understanding and sweet. She can hold her own in a fight and... passionate. She's so passionate about the things she cares about. And the thing she cares about the most is people."

Steve sighed raking a hand through his hair. "But... there's this other girl, that I've met. She's someone I never talked to in school, and I should've because she's amazing. She's so funny and way smarter than me. And I'm afraid to break her heart because she deserves only good things to come to her. And..." He sighed again laying his head back. "I could never hurt either of them because they mean the world to me." After a long silence, Steve asked. "Robin?" He tapped on the stall wall. "Robin, did you just OD in there?"

"No," Robin sighed. "I... am still alive." She sat back up. She took a deep breath trying to calm her racing thoughts. She couldn't keep it from him anymore, not with a speech like that.

Steve slid underneath the stall into Robin's stall to sit across from her.

"The floor's disgusting," Robin said.

"Yeah, well, I've already got a bunch of blood and puke on my shirt so..." Steve said. "What do you think?"

"About?" Robin asked.

"These girls," Steve replied.

"They sound awesome," Robin said.

"They are awesome. They're really awesome. And what about the guy?" Steve asked.

"I think he's on drugs, and he's not thinking straight," Robin replied honestly.

"Really? 'Cause I think he's thinking a lot more clearly than usual," Steve said.

"He's not," Robin declared. "Steve, have you ever wondered why Queenie and I got along so well so quickly?"

Steve shrugged. "Queenie gets along with most everyone."

"Look..." Robin took a deep breath, holding back tears. "I don't think you would want to be friends with me if you actually knew me."

"No, that's not true," Steve said sitting up. "No way is that true."

"Listen to me, Steve," Robin said softly. "It's shocked me to my core, but I like you. I really like you. But, I'm not like your other friends. And I'm not like Nancy Wheeler."

"Robin," he chuckled. "That's exactly why I like you."

Robin scoffed. "I'm not like Queenie Calabrese, Steve." She bit her lip. "Do you remember what I said about Click's class? About me being jealous and like obsessed?"

"Yeah," Steve nodded.

"It wasn't because I had a crush on you," Robin took a deep breath. "It's because... she wouldn't stop staring at you."

"Mrs. Click?" Steve asked not understanding.

Robin chuckled. "Tammy Thompson. I wanted her to look at me. But... she couldn't pull her eyes away from you and your stupid hair. And I didn't understand, because you would get bagel crumbs all over the floor. And you asked dumb questions. And you were a douchebag. And- and you didn't even like her and... I would go home... and just scream into my pillow."

"But Tammy Thompson's a girl," Steve said still confused.

"Steve..." Robin softly said hoping he would get it.

"Yeah?" Steve asked.

Robin sighed and gave him a look on the brink of tears.

"Oh..." Steve said finally understanding.

"Oh," Robin said looking down. She sighed again. "And... I hated Queenie Calabrese. Because she came here from Texas with her bright hair and she... she came out and was open about her sexuality... And- and she wouldn't take lip from anyone... and she didn't get beat up for it... And people still liked her. She just... she dated openly... talked about liking girls. And I was... so jealous of her because I wanted that." Robin looked up at Steve with tears in her eyes. "Then I actually talked to her, and... I couldn't hate her anymore. She was so sweet and kind. When I told her, she got so excited because "she needed a not straight friend"." Robin chuckled. "And I felt so bad for hating her because... how could I do that..."

Steve put a hand on Robin's shoulder. "Don't feel bad about being jealous of Queenie. And... it wasn't always easy on her. And... she can tell you everything, but people did bully her and hate her for it. But... she also knows how to shoot a sawed-off shotgun so..." Steve and Robin chuckled.

Robin smiled. "Thanks, Steve. You know, you should really tell Queenie how you feel."

"I think it's time I stop delaying it," Steve said. "But you? Tammy Thompson, really? I mean, yeah, she's cute and all, but..." He shook his head. "I mean, she's a total dud."

"She is not," Robin argued.

"Yes, she is," Steve argued. "She wants to be, like, a singer. She wants to move to like Nashville and shit."

"She has dreams," Robin defended.

"She can't even hold a tune," Steve complained. Robin rolled her eyes smiling. "She's practically tone-deaf. Have you heard her?"

Robin chuckles shaking her head at her friend.

"All the time," Steve said mocking her singing. "You see me now tonight"

"Shut up," Robin said laughing.

"You see me..." Steve continued to mock Tammy's singing.

"She does not sound like that," Robin argued.

"She sounds exactly- That's a great impression of her," Steve argued back defending himself.

"She does not," Robin shook her head in protest. "You sound like a muppet."

"She sounds like a muppet," Steve said laughing. "She sounds like a muppet giving birth." They laughed together. Steve began singing in a kermit voice. "And if you could hold me tight"

Robin joined in and they sang. "We'd be holding on forever"

"Exactly," Steve said finally making his point.

"I know," Robin laughed causing Steve to laugh again.

Dustin and Erica burst into the bathroom. "Okay," Dustin snapped. "What the hell?"

Instead of answering, Robin and Steve laugh again.

Queenie put her truck in park really hoping beyond all hope that they weren't too late. They rushed into the mall checking Scoops Ahoy for them first. They didn't find them there, but they soon heard a noise from the ground floor. It was a team of Russian with guns that seemed to be searching for someone. Queenie quickly spotted four figures crouched behind a counter. She took in a sharp breath fearing the worst.

Steve just knew they were going to die here. The Russians were going to shoot them all, and he'd never get to tell Queenie how he felt.

Suddenly, the car on display's alarm began to go off. The Russians turned to the car, guns raised. The Russians looked up to see Elle and

the others standing on the balcony. The Russians didn't get to see her long as Elle threw the car at them killing them.

Steve, Dustin, Robin, and Erica slowly stood up looking over to the counter to see that the Russians that had been hunting them now lay dead on the floor. They looked up to see the others. Dustin smiled.

Queenie saw that Steve, Robin, Dustin, and, now, Erica were fine, and she ran down to meet them.

"You flung that thing like a hot wheel!" Dustin said laughing as Mike and Elle approached. He hugged them.

"Lucas?" Erica asked running up to her older brother.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"Robin!" Queenie yelled throwing her arms around the younger woman. "You're okay! I was so worried!"

Robin smiled returning the hug and whispering in Italian. "I told Steve."

Queenie looked at her surprised before smiling. She ran to Dustin and wrapped him in a hug. "Dusty! You're okay!"

"Yeah, I'm okay, Que," he said returning the hug.

Queenie broke the hug looking at the man she'd been worried for the most. "Stevie!"

"Queen!" Steve said as Queenie jumped into his arms. Steve spun her around making the girl laugh. Steve put her down.

Queenie grabbed Steve's face gently. "Why is your face beat up, Stevie?"

"Why are you wearing claws, Queen?" Steve asked rather than answering her.

Queenie smirked gesturing to her outfit. "This is my ass kicking outfit. You... look like you got your ass kicked."

"He actually won a fight," Dustin interrupted.

"You actually won a fight!?" Queenie asked smile widening. "I'm so proud of you, Stevie."

"This feels patronizing," Steve mumbled.

Queenie giggled. "No, I'm actually proud of you. But why are you so hurt if you won the fight?"

"Because, my face got beat when the Russians interrogated me," Steve said. He checked over her body. "What about you? Are you hurt?"

"I've been thrown into a few walls and got choked by my ex who has been taken over by the Mind Flayer, who had a whole army that melted into a giant monster that's going to destroy us all," Queenie said.

"Wait, what?" Steve asked eyes widening in fear.

"Nevermind that," Queenie said waving it off. "Why is Erica here? This a complete violation of child endangerment clause of our protecting our adopted children laws."

"See, child endangerment," Erica snapped.

"You just made that up on the spot," Steve said. "But yeah totally our fault, and in violation of a rule you just made up."

"Okay yeah, but..." Robin interrupted. "I don't understand what happened to that car, so is anybody going to explain that to me."

"Elle has superpowers," Dustin said pointing to Eleven.

"I'm sorry?" Robin asked in disbelief.

"Superpowers," Steve said. "She threw it with her mind. C'mon catch up."

"She was experimented on in a lab," Queenie added. "Total comic book origins."

"That's Elle?" Erica asked in disbelief pointing to Eleven.

"Who's Elle?" Robin asked.

"I'm sorry," Nancy interrupted. "Who are you?"

"I'm Robin," Robin said, holding out her hand. "I work with Steve."

"She's my other friend with brain cells, Nance," Queenie said.

"Wait," Steve looked at Queenie confused. "You and Nancy are friends again."

"Yeah, keep up, Harrington," Queenie said.

"I was underground being interrogated by Russians, Calabrese," Steve complained.

Queenie rolled her eyes waving him off. She turned to Robin. "Elle is my daughter." Eleven snickered at this. "In fact, these are all my kids. You know, Steve and I are like their divorced parents that still get along as friends."

"Okay, okay," Steve said putting a hand on her mouth to shut her up. "That's not important right now."

Queenie moved his hand off her mouth. "What's important is combining our knowledge. What did you find out about the Russians?"

"The Russians opened the gate," Dustin said.

"Wait, what?" Max asked.

"The Russians opened the gate, as in the Russian government," Jonathan snapped. "Why?"

"We don't know why," Steve said.

"We just know they opened the gate, and we have to close it," Dustin replied.

Queenie mumbled curses in Italian. "When is the next flight to

Houston? Because I'm not fighting Russians, my ex-boyfriend, and a goddamn monster. That's too much."

"Queenie!" Will snapped.

"Will, honey, I love you, but this is..." Queenie continued her sentence under her breath in Italian.

The discussion was cut short when they heard a loud thump. They looked over to see Elle laying on the ground.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa," Dustin said as he and Mike rushed to her sides.

"Elle! Elle!" Mike turned her onto her back holding her hand. "What's wrong? What's wrong? What's wrong?"

"My leg, my leg," Elle complained.

"Her leg, her leg, okay," Jonathan said. Jonathan, Nancy, and Dustin began to unwrap her leg. "Get that off."

"Okay," Nancy said peeling back the gauze.

Everyone except Queenie exclaimed in disgust. Queenie calmly looked into Elle's eyes and said. "It's not that bad. I've seen way worse. You're gonna be fine, sweetie. I need you to stay calm for me though."

Elle nodded when suddenly the lump underneath her skin began moving.

"Okay," Queenie mumbled in Italian. "Never seen that before."

Elle grunted and wailed in pain.

"Elle! Elle!" Mike yelled taking her hand again. "Elle! Elle, are you okay?"

"Elle," Queenie said as calmly as she could. "Hold onto Mike; squeeze his hand. He's your rock." Queenie turned to Mike who was yelling "Elle" getting more distressed with each one. "Mike, I'm gonna need you to be a boulder not a pebble." Mike nodded calming slightly at

the woman's words.

Elle screamed in pain gripping Mike's hand tightly.

25. Chapter 8: The Battle of Starcourt

Eleven was screaming and writhing in pain. Queenie and Jonathan were bent over the side of her accessing her leg. "Something's moving in her leg," Jonathan mumbled loud enough only for Queenie to hear.

Queenie met his eyes. "When the Mind Flayer grabbed her leg, maybe... maybe it left something behind... a tracker of sorts..."

Jonathan nodded. "The Mind Flayer wants to kill Elle..."

"But, it has to guarantee that it can find her first," Queenie added.

The two shared a knowing look before Jonathan ran off to find a knife. "Keep her talking, keep her awake, okay?"

Queenie dove to her bag searching for the sewing kit she picked up. Finding it she handed the needle to Robin, "Sterilize that for me. If we're gonna get this thing out, we have to sew her back up." Queenie slipped off her talons setting them to the side.

Robin nodded running off with the needle. "Max," Queenie said getting the red-headed girl's attention. "Talk to her about your trip to the mall. Keep her mind off of the pain." Robin returned handing Queenie the needle who nodded in thanks. "Mike, prop her head up on your lap. Keep her legs down."

They began to move her carefully as Max talked to her about something that happened in Kaufman's shoes the other day which made Elle smile.

"Easy, easy, easy," Steve said as Elle gave a whimper of pain.

"You know," Robin said panic evident in her voice. "It's not actually that bad. There was a... The goalie on my soccer team, Beth Wildfire, this other girl slid into her leg, and the whole bone came out of her knee, six inches or something. It was insane."

"Robin," Steve said. Everyone was staring at her with a mix of disgust and disbelief.

"Yeah?" She asked still panicked.

"You're not helping," Steve said.

"I'm sorry," Robin said looking back at Elle.

"Robin," Queenie looked up at her kinder than everyone else. "I'm gonna need you to keep it together for five seconds for me. Can you do that?"

Robin took a deep breath. "Yeah."

Queenie smiled to herself looking down at Elle again. "Better than Steve," she mumbled under her breath making her best friend shoot her a glare.

Jonathan returned with a knife kneeling next to Elle's leg. "Okay. Alright, Elle? This is gonna hurt like hell, okay?"

"Okay," Elle sobbed.

"I need you to stay real still," Jonathan said before handing her a wooden spoon to bite on. "Here, you're gonna want to bite down on this, okay?"

"Jesus Christ," Dustin mumbled.

"Jon," Queenie said stopping him. "Maybe, I should do it. We know how you get with gore."

"We know how you get with gore," Jonathan snapped.

Queenie grabbed the glove from him and put it on. "I'm the eldest." She took the knife from him giving him a meaningful look. "Besides I've done this before."

Jonathan sighed giving her a sympathetic look before nodding in agreement.

"Elle," Queenie said bending over the girl. "Think about the thing you love the most in the world. Close your eyes and only think about that. It won't stop the pain, but I've learned it helps it."

Queenie moved her leg to where she could clearly see the thing that was squirming underneath her skin. Queenie took a deep breath before sinking the knife into Elle's skin making the thing wiggle away from the cut. "Oh no you don't, fucker," Queenie whispered pushing it back towards the incision not noticing that the world around her had begun to go fuzzy. She cut further down exposing the slug like thing left by the Mind Flayer. She couldn't hear anyone around her, only the buzzing in her ears. Queenie gripped the knife tighter finishing out the cut on Dominique's skin.

Queenie backed away in horror at what she had done. The body, her brother, wasn't moving how could she have done this. What had she done!? "I didn't kill Nicky," she whispered in desperation that the angry eyes watching her would believe her. "I didn't kill him! I didn't!" She sobbed openly.

Queenie didn't notice when Elle used her power to pull the slug thing out of her leg shattering the glass beside them. She didn't notice her father arrive with Murray, Joyce, and Hopper who squashed the slug thing.

Queenie just stood there gripping the knife tightly and sobbing while saying over and over. "I didn't kill Nicky."

A pair of brown eyes found their way into Queenie's vision. She felt a hand grip hers with the knife keeping it away from both of their bodies. Queenie had no idea who this person was so she kept trying to fight them. They had to want to hurt her. They had to believe she had hurt Nicky.

"Principessa," the brown-eyed person said getting Queenie to stop struggling. The knife fell from her grasp as the brown-eyed person gripped her other hand as well. "No one thinks you hurt Dominique. Dominique isn't here. He's in a better place. No one can hurt him anymore. Look at me."

Queenie focused on the brown eyes, a familiar comfort.

"Only at me," the figure said. "I'm here. I'm real." The person cupped Queenie's face as she began to make out more of their shape. They had dark hair, and their hands felt familiar, like they belonged. The

tension in Queenie's shoulders dropped. "You're in Hawkins. The kids are here. Your friends are here. Your dad's here. We're real." Queenie blinked the face of the person starting to come into focus. The person had a black eye and a cut lip. "I'm here, Queen. I... I lo..."

Queenie reached up cupping his face in her hands. "Stevie," she mumbled pulling herself even closer to him. "Steven..." She sighed throwing her arms around his neck in a hug.

"Queenie," he mumbled into her hair wrapping his arms around her waist. They broke the hug. Steve held Queenie by her waist as Queenie kept her arms around his neck. "May I-"

Queenie cut off his question by crashing her lips onto his. Steve smiled into the kiss. Either unaware of everyone standing beside them watching or not caring that everyone was standing there watching them, they deepened the kiss. Finally after what felt to everyone else like an eternity, they broke apart. "Steven Harrington, I love you."

"Queenie Calabrese, I love you even more," Steve said smiling like an idiot. He leaned down and pecked her lips.

"Stevie," Queenie smirked. "You're corny as hell."

"Queen, you love corny as hell," Steve argued.

Queenie laughed but didn't disagree.

"I'm glad you two are together because I've been trying to do that for a long ass time now, but we still have a hostile government and giant monster to fight," Dustin snapped sassily.

Steve and Queenie turned to him still in each other's arms.

"You've been hanging out with Erica too much," Queenie complained. "You're starting to sound like her."

"Don't act like you had anything to do with this, Henderson," Steve snapped not wanting to admit that the boy might have had a hand in it.

"I had everything to do with this, Harrington," Dustin snapped.

The two launched into an argument making Queenie roll her eyes. Queenie made eye-contact with Elle causing her to remember that she needed to finish the job. "Oh, I need to sew you up."

Steve looked at her worriedly as she bent down to sew up the wound. "Will you be alright to do that?"

"Stevie," Queenie glanced back at him. "I've never gotten a flashback from sewing something. I'll be fine."

"Please be careful," Steve said. "I want to take you on a proper date when all this is over."

"Probably want to get your face fixed before you take me out, Harrington," Queenie said with a mischievous smile as she threaded the needle.

"You know you love me and my beat up face, Calabrese," Steve teased.

Queenie snickered rolling her eyes. "Keep telling yourself that, Harrington." She looked to Elle. "This is going to hurt, but tell me about your favorite thing." Elle nodded and began talking about hanging out with Max the last few days, and how Max had given her a Wonder Woman comic to read that she really liked. Queenie stuck the needle through Elle's leg focusing on sewing the girl up.

"Harrington," Romeo called, his Italian accent which most of the time no one noticed was very prominent. "We need to have a discussion about you calling my daughter by my nickname for her." Steve swallowed nervously. "Other than that," Romeo smiled at him. "Thank you."

Steve smiled and nodded at the man that had come to be like a father figure to him.

"Alright," Hopper said successfully changing the subject from Steve and Queenie. "I want to know what's going on. All that you know."

Queenie continued to sew up Elle's leg ignoring the glances from

everyone that Steve and her were receiving as Mike explained to the new arrivals what had happened. "The Mind Flayer, it built this monster in Hawkins, to stop Elle, to kill her, pave a way into our world."

"And it almost did," Nancy added. "That was just one tiny piece of it."

"How big is this thing?" Hopper asked.

"It's big," Jonathan murmurs. "Thirty feet, at least."

"Yeah," Lucas agreed. "It sorta destroyed your cabin. Sorry."

Queenie tied off the stitches. Romeo handed her the knife she had dropped earlier, and she cut the stitches from the spool.

"Okay, so," Steve said. "Just to be clear, this... this big fleshy spider thing that hurt Elle, it's some type of gigantic... weapon?"

"Yes," Nancy said.

"But instead of like metal or screws, the Mind Flayer made it's weapon... with melted people?" Steve finished as Queenie slipped on her talons again.

"Yes, exactly," Nancy said.

"Yeah, okay," Steve said. "I- Yeah, I'm just making sure."

"Are we sure that this thing is still out there, still alive?" Joyce asked.

"Elle, beat the shit out of it," Max said. "But, yeah, it's still alive."

"But if we close the gate again-" Will began.

"We cut the brain off from the body," Max added.

"And kill it," Lucas finished. "Theoretically."

"And what if that doesn't kill it?" Romeo asked. "What is the plan then?"

Queenie let the knife clatter to the floor again and stormed off. "I'm

not going through this again."

"Que," Jonathan called, "Where are you going?"

Queenie turned on her heel to face them again. "I'm leaving. I was serious about that flight to Houston." Queenie blinked back tears taking a shaky breath. Romeo placed a hand on her arm to comfort her. Queenie looked at Steve letting a tear fall. "In Texas, I faced the kind of monster you have nightmares about in adulthood. In Hawkins, I've faced the monsters you have nightmares about as a child. But..." She took a shaky breath letting a few more tears fall. "But... now you want me to face both... at the same time. And... I... I just... I can't do it." Queenie was openly sobbing now. "I dread the day I have to go back for his trial, but... right now... I can't face all of this. I'm falling apart as it is... and every bit of happiness I find..." She met Steve's eyes seeing them break at her words. "Has been viciously ripped from me by something or someone... I just can't face all of these demons at once..." Romeo pulled Queenie into a hug hiding her crying eyes from everyone. Steve crossed the way to put a hand on her back.

"Yoo-hoo!" Murray called from across the food court breaking the tense moment. "Yoo-hoo!" He was waving papers above his head walking towards them. He sat down the papers showing a map of the Russian facility drawn out for them.

Queenie and Romeo were lowly conversing in Italian not really paying attention to what he was saying. Once Romeo assured Queenie she wouldn't have to face these monsters alone and Steve wouldn't be ripped from her, they turned to Murray's debriefing.

"More like 500," Erica snapped stepping forward. "What, you're just gonna waltz in there like it's commie Disneyland or something?"

"I'm sorry," Murray said. "Who are you?"

"Erica Sinclair," She replied sassily. "Who are you?"

"Murray..." He glanced down. "Bauman."

"Listen, Mr. Bunman, I'm not trying to tell you how to do things,"

Erica snapped. "But I've been down in that shithole for 24 hours. And with all due respect, you do what this man tells you, you're all gonna die."

Queenie hissed at the girl in Italian. "Erica, where are your manners?"

She was ignored as Murray complained. "I'm sorry, why is this four-year old speaking to me?"

"That four-year old is smarter than you," Queenie snapped in Italian making Romeo laugh.

"Um, I'm ten, you bald bastard," Erica corrected.

"Erica!" Lucas complained.

"Just the facts!" Erica said looking at her brother.

Queenie gave her father's arm a reassuring squeeze before walking over to Steve and leaning onto him. "I'm proud of our youngest daughter," Queenie mumbled.

Steve snickered wrapping his arms around her.

"She's right," Dustin agreed stepping forward. "You're all gonna die, but you don't have to. Excuse me." He pointed down to the map. "Sorry, may I?"

"Please," Murray said sarcastically.

Queenie smirked at the man's annoyance. Even though her father had worked with him and he helped with Barb, Queenie couldn't help but to dislike the man's attitude. Queenie wrapped her arm around one of Steve's arms that held her, just reassurance that he was there.

Dustin sat down taking the hand drawn map. "Okay, see this room here? This is a storage facility. There's a hatch in here that feeds into their underground ventilation system. That will lead you to the base of the weapon. It's a bit of a maze down there, but between me and Erica, we can show you the way." Erica nodded.

"You can show us the way?" Hopper asked.

"Don't worry, you can do all the fighting and the dangerous hero shit, and we'll just be your... navigators." Dustin reassured looking at Erica who continued to nod.

Hopper looked at him nodding. "No." He shook his head. "Nope."

"For once," Queenie stepped forward putting a hand on Dustin's shoulder. "I agree with Hopper." Hopper gave her an exasperated look but let her continue to speak. "You kids have been in way too much danger for the past day, and I've been too depressed and scared to do anything to actually help you." Steve put a hand on her back rubbing it comfortingly. "I'm not about to let you children put yourselves in danger again."

"Queenie bu-" Dustin began to argue until Queenie cut him off yelling. "Figlio, è definitivo!"

Dustin and Erica shared a terrified look but nodded in agreement at her command.

As the others gathered equipment from the dead Russians, Queenie turned to Steve hugging him tightly. Queenie buried her face in his chest. "Be careful, amore," she mumbled.

Steve kissed the top of her head. "I will," Steve said tilting her chin up to look at him. "Please don't get hurt."

Queenie smirked. "Me? Hurt?" She pecked his lips. "Never."

Steve chuckled rolling his eyes at the woman. He captured her lips in another passionate kiss. Queenie smirked nibbling his bottom lip and pulling on it teasingly. Steve smiled into the kiss, trailing smaller kisses down her jaw around and back to her lips. Their tongues clashed in a war for dominance over each other until they heard someone clear their throat.

"If you two lovebirds are done sticking your tongues down each other's throat, we've got somewhere to be," Robin smirked at the two older teenagers who were out of breath and red-faced.

Queenie giggled at Robin's snide remark slinging her arms around the girl in a hug. "Next year, I'm bringing both of you to Pride."

"Can't wait," Steve said as Robin replied with, "Wouldn't miss it for the world."

Queenie gave Robin a peck on the cheek followed by Steve before leaving the two to take Dustin and Erica to Cerebro.

Romeo smiled sadly at his daughter as she approached him. "You didn't tell him, did you?" Romeo asked in Italian.

"Dad, how could I?" Queenie replied in Italian.

"You know you don't have to do this," Romeo said switching back to English and cupping his daughter's face.

"But I do, Papá," Queenie smiled not noticing the tear that fell from her eyes. "I can't lose someone else. I made a promise to myself that I wouldn't fail again."

Romeo wiped his daughter's tears away. "I know, principessa. I know you have to do this." Romeo pulled Queenie into a tight hug. "Please don't leave me tonight."

"I won't," Queenie whispered holding back more tears. "I've got back up." They pulled away from their hug, and Queenie pulled out Dominique's pendant. "I've got my brother." She dug around in her pocket producing Loreta's badge. "And mom."

Romeo smiled sadly, tears finally falling from his eyes. "I'm so proud of the woman you've become." He gave her a kiss on the forehead. "I love you, figlia."

Queenie smiled wiping her father's tears now. "I love you too, papá."

"Que," Jonathan said getting the woman's attention. "You ready to go?"

"I'm not going with y'all," Queenie replied giving her friend a sad smile.

"What?" Nancy said turning to her in disbelief. "What do you mean?"

"Take care of the kids for me," Queenie said giving her friends a

squeeze on their arms.

"Queenie, you have-" Nancy began but Queenie interrupted her with pleading eyes. "Please, Nance."

Nancy sighed nodding. "We'll keep them safe."

"You be safe too, Que," Jonathan said wrapping his older friend in a hug.

Queenie nodded leaving the two of them behind. Somewhere deep down, she knew this was a bad idea, but she had found no alternative. Queenie slid underneath the gate of Scoops Ahoy. She found her way to the back room, where her clothes from the other night were still there. She grabbed her shirt and wrapped it around her mouth for protection. She also grabbed a pair of disposable gloves and began looking for the cleaning products. When she didn't find everything that she was looking for, she raided the other areas of the mall including the first aid station. She grabbed a pair of glasses from an Old Navy rack and set to work.

As Queenie finished her last preparations and started to leave the mall, Nancy, Jonathan, and the kids came rushing back in. "What happened?"

"Billy found us," Nancy explained out of breath.

"Stole our ignition cable," Jonathan added.

"Good," Queenie said. "Now, I don't have to go looking for him." She started to step outside but Jonathan grabbed her arm.

"Whoa, you're gonna go out there alone?" Jonathan asked looking at her concerned. "He could kill you, Que."

Queenie held up a bottle labeled Hydrogen Peroxide. "Good thing, I'm prepared to fight."

"How are you going to fight him with that?" Nancy asked looking at the woman like she was insane.

Queenie smiled sadly lifting up her shirt to show the bubbled, scarred

skin of a chemical burn. "The good thing about being kidnapped, you find out what household cleaners become deadly when mixed." She looked at the bottle. "Hydrogen Peroxide and Vinegar create the highly corrosive Peracetic Acid. We got Will out by heat," she explained. "And there's nothing hotter than a burn."

Jonathan and Nancy stared at her speechless.

"I'm hoping we can get the Mind Flayer out of Billy in one swift action," Queenie continued. "And if we act quick enough, he won't even scar."

"Queenie, you can't be seriously thinking about this," Jonathan snapped.

"What other choice do we have, Jonathan!?" She yelled turning to him. "If we don't try something now, we're going to lose Billy forever. And I know you don't like him, but I can't lose him. I can't lose anyone else I care about. Don't you understand that."

Jonathan swallowed nervously.

"And what if that fails?" Nancy chimed in.

Queenie pulled another bottle out of her bag. This one read Rubbing Alcohol. "Chloroform. With a small amount, I can knock him out. And then we can move to any other location. Somewhere where the Mind Flayer wouldn't be able to find us. Even if we have to take him with us. Even if we have to walk there."

Queenie looked at each of them, tears filling her eyes again. "Look, I've thought this through, and I don't want Billy to die. I can't let him die. This is my chance to save him." Queenie let a tear fall, her voice cracking. "Please, let me do this."

Jonathan and Nancy shared a look before nodding.

Queenie smiled wiping her tears away. She turned from them to the door. She reached out to open it before someone called out to her. "QUEENIE!"

Queenie turned around to be met with a hug from Max. "Please bring

my brother back."

"I'm gonna try my best, Maxie," Queenie said rubbing the girl's head. Queenie placed a kiss on top of her head and stepped out of the mall.

Queenie laughed as Billy crept up beside her on the bed. He popped another marshmallow in her mouth. Queenie let her lips linger on his fingers. She smiled as he popped another in his mouth. "You know," Queenie said. "We should stop eating these. They're pure sugar."

Billy smirked, popping another in his mouth. "Does that mean I should stop eating you because you're pure sugar?"

Queenie giggled. "Oh come on, you know I've got a bit of spice."

"Mmm," Billy leaned over touching his nose to hers. "You do." He kissed her. And again. And again. And again. And again. Finally, they broke apart and Queenie curled up to him with her head on his chest. Billy wrapped his arm around her body protectively.

"You make me feel so safe," Queenie said tracing circles on his chest.

Billy looked down at her. "What kind of boyfriend would I be if I didn't protect you?"

Queenie chuckled meeting his eyes. "A pretty shitty one."

Billy smirked leaning down to give her another small kiss. Queenie met it, intensifying the kiss. Billy slipped his tongue past her lips exploring every inch of her mouth. "I love you."

Queenie smiled, a line of saliva connecting them. "I love you too." The song on the radio changed to Shadows of the Night making Queenie smirk. She climbed on top of Billy straddling him. "You remember the night we listened to this song and..."

"Fell in love slowly?" Billy offered.

Queenie smiled in approval and met his lips in a passionate kiss as Billy rolled her over in the bed.

Queenie shook the memory off and looked into the headlights of Billy's car. She took a deep breath. If she couldn't save him from the Mind Flayer, she didn't know what she would do with herself. She knew that she could never love him like she once had, but she couldn't let go of the love they had shared.

"Billy," Queenie whispered to herself. "We may not have worked out, but I know there's a good person in there under all that pain." She gripped the peracetic acid tighter. "And I want you to find him." Queenie said tears streaming down her face again.

Oddly, Billy wasn't moving the car. The monster, the Mind Flayer, was controlling his actions, but seeing the purple-haired girl in front of his headlights openly cry, an involuntary tear fell down his face. He wanted so badly to reach out to her. To comfort her, like he had once. But he had lost that chance when he acted like his father in their relationship. Besides, she deserved so much more.

The engine of Billy's car revved making Queenie jump back in fright. When it didn't move forward, she took a few more steps forward. She searched his blue eyes for any sign of the man she once loved. Queenie reached out to find the handle of his door before a thunderous sound interrupted her. She looked up to spot the Mind Flayer within sight of the mall now.

"I have to warn the others," she mumbled. Giving one last glance to Billy, she ran back towards the entrance of the mall.

"The Mind Flayer," Queenie yelled bursting back through the doors of the mall. "It's here." She grabbed Max and led her to a hiding spot.

The monster screeched as it crashed through the ceiling.

As Erica, Dustin, and Robin sat on the grass giving orders to Bauman, Steve noticed some strange lights in the distance. He moved closer to get a better look at it. The flashing lights were coming from the mall. "Hey, guys?"

The others stood up, running over to see what he was looking at. The

lights from the mall we're rapidly flickering from white to red to blue, over and over again. They all ran back to the radio. "Griswold family, this is Scoops Troop! Do you copy? Over!" Dustin yelled panicked into it.

They received no answer. "Griswold family, I repeat this Scoops Troop! Do you-" A strange sound interrupted him on the radio. "Griswold family, do you copy?"

Steve's mind and heart were racing. He couldn't lose Queenie, not after he just told her, he loved her. What would he do without her? What would Romeo do without his daughter? He promised her. He'd never let anyone hurt her ever again. That's gotta cover interdimensional monsters, right?

They received a roar as an answer. The color drained from all of their faces. "Griswold family, this is Scoops Troop. Please confirm your safety." Dustin tried again but received no type of answer this time.

Steve knew what he had to do. He had to keep his promise, no matter the cost. Steve ran towards the car.

"Where are you going?" Erica yelled.

"To get them the hell outta there!" Steve answered with not so much as a look back. The only thing on his mind was their safety not his own. "Stay here, contact the others!"

"Shit," Robin mumbled running after him.

"Wait, Robin!" Dustin yelled after the retreating figure.

Robin turned back.

"Stay in touch," Dustin said tossing her his walkie-talkie.

"Got it," Robin said taking off after Steve again.

"Bald Eagle, this is Scoops Troop. What's your 20?" Dustin asked into the radio.

"Steve," Robin said hopping into the passenger seat. "Have you

thought of how we're going to get them out of there?"

"No," He threw the car into reverse and backed out of the field. "But we don't really have much time for plans! We'll think of one on the way!"

"Steve," Robin said trying to be level-headed. "We can't get ourselves stuck in the same situation of them if you want to save them."

"I know," Steve moved the car into drive as they made it out onto the road. "I just can't break my promise to Queenie... or Romeo." He paused, holding back a tear that threatened to fall out of his good eye. "I have to protect... I have to protect... the people I care about. I have to protect the kids. And... I have to protect her."

Robin smiled sadly at her friend. "We'll get them outta there."

The creature hissed and snarled looking for any sign of the people hiding in the mall. Queenie didn't notice that she had stopped breathing until Max put her hand on top of her leg. "We have to get out," Queenie whispered.

Mike peeked up when it sounded far away. "It's turned away. If we go up the stairs now, we'll make it."

"No way," Max shook her head. "Not with Elle's leg."

"We have to try," Mike said desperately.

"There's another way..." Elle whispered grabbing Mike's shoulder. "To get out. Through the Gap."

Queenie nodded. "I know those employee halls like the back of my hand. We can make it out and avoid Billy."

Mike looked back at the monster then back to the others. He nodded. "Okay." He took Elle's hand. "Now."

Mike led Elle to the Gap and Queenie grabbed Max's hand. They ran as quietly and quickly as they could. Suddenly though someone

knocked over a display rack. It clattered to the ground, and the monster turned towards them.

"Hide," Queenie hissed pushing the kids towards a hiding spot in the Gap. She slipped quietly around back towards Scoops Ahoy. The monster forced a leg into the store and sent smaller tentacles out of its body to look for them. It picked up a mannequin wearing Elle's shirt and threw it when it realized it wasn't Elle.

Queenie, now having made it into Scoops Ahoy, knocked over an entire stack of bowls and cutlery. The monster screeched and turned its attention to her. While it was distracted Max, Mike, and Elle found their way to the employee entrance at the back of the Gap. Queenie pushed the metal table in the back room to hide the sound of the door opening. The monster's tentacle screeched getting ever so closer to her. Queenie could just feel this was it. Then suddenly a balloon popped from across the mall. Lucas had shot it with his slingshot. The monster turned from Queenie to the sound allowing the woman to escape out the back of Scoops Ahoy. The other four escaped while the monster was distracted as well.

Jonathan, Nancy, Lucas, and Will ran out of the mall to the Wheeler's waiting car. Jonathan began to attach the ignition cable into the car. As he did this, Billy revved his engine.

"Get the car started," Nancy said cocking the pistol. "Go!"

Jonathan scrambled into the car to do just that. He turned the key but the engine only sputtered. "No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. Come on." He turned the key again, but it still didn't start.

Billy pulled his car into drive and began speeding towards the car and Nancy, who was shooting at him trying desperately to slow him down.

"Come on," Jonathan muttered trying the key again.

"We gotta go," Lucas exclaimed in a panic seeing the car speeding towards them.

Nancy, however, kept her cool and continued to shoot at his

windshield. Each shot, though hitting its target didn't phase Billy. When she ran out of bullets, the gravity of her situation finally hit her. Nancy dived expecting impact but it never came.

Steve and Robin had hit into the side of Billy's speeding car, just in time, knocking him off course. Billy's car went up in flames, but he didn't move from the driver's seat. Nancy looked up breathing heavily to see what had happened.

"Are you okay?" Steve asked Robin.

Robin looked to him. "Ask me tomorrow?"

The Mind Flayer snarled again making Robin and Steve look up to it. "Oh shit!" Robin exclaimed. A car horn honked beside them, as the other four pulled up.

"Get in," Nancy yelled at them. The two ran from the Toddfather over to the Wheeler's trunk of their hatchback.

Steve slammed the door looking back on the creature that was now following them. At least he knew Queenie was safe.

Queenie ran through the employee corridors finding her way to the Gap where Mike and Max were supporting Elle. "Hey, hey," she said taking Elle from them and helping her sit down. "Don't worry, that thing has gone away for now. Take a second. Breathe."

Elle nodded swallowing the pain. She took a few deep breaths. "We should... keep... moving."

"Not with you like this," Queenie said. "You'll kill yourself."

"Please..." Elle began to argue.

"We have to keep going," Mike said.

"What if it comes back?" Max added.

Queenie sighed. "Fine." She picked Elle up like a bride. "Let's go!"

The two younger teenagers followed Queenie through the employee

halls. She led them to a back entrance where they went out the gate and met Billy.

"Shit," Max exclaimed.

Queenie put Elle down draping her arms over both Mike and Max's shoulders. "Go, take her back inside. Find another exit. I'll take care of Billy."

Max slammed the button to close it behind her. "Queenie come on!"

Queenie glanced back at the three kids running back into the mall. As the door slammed behind them, Queenie turned to Billy who forced the gate open. "Hi." She said unscrewing the bottle of peracetic acid. Billy took a menacing step towards her. His veins were black. He was covered in sweat. There was no life in his eyes. Queenie dropped the cap. In one swift move, Queenie tossed the acid at him and took off sprinting towards the door. Billy hissed in pain, but the Mind Flayer didn't let go of his mind.

Queenie tossed the useless bottle to the side as she ran through the employee halls for once cursing her heels. She heard the door open behind her and decided to put those stupid heels to good use. She turned taking one off and threw it heel first at Billy. It hit his left shoulder plunging into it slightly. Queenie cringed. "I'm sorry." She took off the other and threw it as Billy went to pull the first one out of his shoulder. This one plunged into his right arm. Billy ripped the one out of his left shoulder and threw it back at Queenie who barely dodged it. Then he ripped the other out of his arm and threw it to where Queenie had dove out of the way. This one hit her leather jacket breaking the skin underneath but not embedding itself into her.

Ignoring the pain Queenie kept running down the halls pulling her shirt out of her back pocket where she'd stored it after using it as a mask. She took out the bottle of homemade chloroform and poured a bit on the rag. She had really hoped it wouldn't come to this.

Billy caught up to Queenie and grabbed her by the throat ignoring the spiked choker she wore. Queenie shoved the chloroform covered shirt towards his face, but Billy twisted her arm holding. Queenie

cried out in pain. She heard something crack, but she wasn't sure what it was. "Billy..." she forced out. "I'm sorry..." Nothing in his face changed, he only squeezed her throat tighter. "I... I... lo... love... y... you" She said before blacking out. If she hadn't blacked out, she would've seen the shock on Billy's face momentarily before it returned to its stone cold façade.

"My mom," Billy said smiling sadly. "She was the best person I'd ever met." Queenie took his hand in hers. "She was so kind and loving. I'll never understand why she married my father." Billy looked over to Queenie who was listening intently to his story. "I thought I'd never meet anyone like her... but then I met you." Billy brought Queenie's hand to his lips and gave it a small kiss.

Queenie smiled looking down. "Back home, in Texas, Dominique was always the cheerful one, the outgoing one, the one that got along with everyone. Sometimes, it felt like I would never get out of his shadow. But now..." A tear escaped Queenie's eye. "I miss his shadow more than anything. So... I find people... People that remind me of him. You... you remind me of Dom." Queenie looked to his face lovingly. "You have the same gorgeous blue eyes. You have the same sense of humor. The same bad smoking habit. The same ability to draw people to you." Queenie smiled licking her lips. "The same rebellious attitude." Queenie took a shaky breath. "I never expected to lose my best friend, but then again I didn't think I'd find him in someone else."

Queenie looked up to Billy giving him a small kiss on the lips. "Thank you," she whispered. "Thank you..."

Billy pulled her into a hug. "Thank you... for reminding me what happiness felt like."

Queenie came to shaking off the memory. She had loved Billy, so much. But he wasn't Dom. He wasn't even the person she knew that was the most like him. Because that was the man she loved now, that was Steve. Steve was almost a carbon copy of her twin. That is if Dominique was straight and had brown eyes. But other than being someone to help fill part of the hole Dominique left, he was also Steve. Steve who would march into any dangerous situation without a second thought if it meant saving the ones he cared about from

danger. Steve who realized his mistakes and did everything in his power to make it up and change. Steve who didn't judge her for not wanting to tell anyone about what was going on with Billy. Steve who was always there for her when she cried. Steve Harrington, the man she loved. The man she couldn't imagine her life without. The man who helped her realize that loving someone in the past and in the present are two very different emotions that feel the same.

Suddenly, a loud screech broke Queenie from her thoughts. Queenie wiped her tears away and ran towards the sound to see Billy holding off the Mind Flayer from Elle. The creature latched one of its tentacles onto his side and then another onto his other side making the man cry out in pain. The Mind Flayer began to put more and more tentacles through Billy's body making Queenie hold back a sob. With one final tentacle through his chest, Queenie knew she'd lost someone else. With one last screech, the monster fell dropping Billy's lifeless body.

"NO!" Queenie yelled running to his side. "BILLY!" She kneeled beside him tears streaming down her face.

Billy smiled sadly he whispered. "Mom would've loved you."

"NO!" Queenie fell into more sobs not noticing Max kneeling beside her.

Billy looked to Max choking out. "Max, I'm sorry." Before, completely succumbing to his injuries.

Max tried her best to wake Billy up, but Queenie was sobbing to loud to notice anything else around her. Someone took Queenie into their arms. They felt familiar. As Queenie sunk further, her sobs getting louder, she realized it was Steve who was holding her.

They heard helicopters outside. "Sounds like our help got here too late," Queenie mumbled bitterly.

Steve placed a kiss on her head and held her tighter. A medic came in and separated the two of them to check on their injuries.

Queenie was still in shock. She was just praying that her father was

okay.

Romeo stumbled to the surface with the assistance of soldiers. He couldn't believe that Chief Hopper was gone. He was searching the crowds for Queenie. Finally, he saw standing next to an EMT trying desperately to get her attention.

"Papá!" Queenie yelled running over to her father and hugging him tightly.

"Figlia!" He exclaimed as she rocketed into his arms.

It was hard for the two injured Calabreses to stay upright, but they managed by holding on to each other. Romeo had been knocked out by a soldier when they had gotten to the manual shut off. Steve noticed the two family members and smiled.

"Figlio!" Romeo yelled meeting Steve's eyes. "Get over here!"

Steve smiled walking over to join the family's hug. No matter who they'd lost, they were happy to have each other.

Three Months Later...

Queenie smiled petting their new cat, Mr. Mistoffelees, as Steve pulled into Robin's driveway. Despite everything that had happened, she felt a sense of home being back in Hawkins.

"Hey, Rob," Queenie said smiling. "You ready for this job interview?"

"Glad to have the two of you back in town for a bit," Robin said climbing into the backseat.

"Good to see you, Robin," Steve said smiling. He looked over at his girlfriend of three months and gave Mr. Mistoffelees a quick pat.

Steve pulled up in front of the Family Video and the four of them, cat included, walked in.

"Uh, just to be clear," Robin said to Keith who was looking at the cat

in Queenie's arm with distaste. "I wasn't fired. The mall burned down and, like, killed a bunch of people."

"Thanks for sharing," Keith dead-panned. "Didn't know. You know you can't have that in here." He pointed to Mr. Mistoffelees.

Queenie scoffed in disbelief. "Keith! Mr. Mistoffelees isn't a that! He's a treasured member of the family!"

"Don't get her started on this, man," Steve said putting his arm around his girlfriend.

"Look at that face," Queenie turned Mr. Mistoffelees to face Keith. "How could you say no to our baby?"

Keith sighed. "Only because I like you, Calabrese."

Queenie smiled. "Thanks, Keith."

Keith turned back to Robin. "Three favorite movies. Go."

"Uh..." Robin said. "The Apartment, Hidden Fortress, Children of Paradise."

"You," Keith pointed to Queenie. "Go."

"Oh!" Queenie jumped in surprise not expecting that. "Um, The Third Man, Deep Red, and... The Godfather."

"You," Keith pointed to Steve. "Go."

"What?" Steve said "I'm not being interviewed."

"Did I stutter?" Keith asked.

Queenie rolled her eyes. "Don't give him a hard time."

"Am I supposed to not give him a hard time now because he's your boyfriend?" Keith teased.

Queenie straightened up glaring at her former co-worker. "Yes. Don't give my boyfriend a hard time."

"Why are you dating him?" Keith asked giving Queenie a disappointed look, even Keith knew the woman could do better.

"Because," Queenie looked up at Steve lovingly. "He's the best man I've ever met." She smirked. "Even if he is an idiot." She dove away from him running through the aisles.

"Hey!" Steve chased after her. "I'm an idiot you love!"

Keith looked to Robin. "Despite the company you keep, you start Monday."

Steve ran into a cardboard cut-out, because he was so focused on his beautiful girlfriend, who was laughing her head off at this point. He struggled to put the cut-out back together, so, still laughing, Queenie crossed the way to help him as Robin and Keith watched them.

Robin laughed at her two friends as Keith said. "Don't let them in my store alone."

Robin nodded holding in more laughter.

"You got the job!" Queenie exclaimed as they went out to Steve's car.

"Yeah," Robin said smiling. "I was pretty sure I was going to get it."

"Now, hurry," Queenie said to Steve. "I want to see the Byers off before we get on the road."

Steve nodded and headed towards the Byers now old house. As they got there, they were packing the last few things in the truck. Queenie handed Mr. Mistoffelees off to Steve.

"Hey," she said grabbing their attention. "Just wanted to say goodbye."

Will and Elle ran up to Queenie wrapping her in a hug to hide their tears. "Promise me, you'll come visit." Will whispered.

"Of course we will," Queenie said. She looked at them both. "And you kids can always crash Steve and I's place together."

Elle laughed through her tears.

Queenie turned from the two younger teens to her first best friend in Hawkins, Jonathan Byers. She didn't expect the tears to come before she even hugged him, but the two friends held each other tight remembering everything they had been through together.

Queenie sniffed loudly looking up into Jonathan's brown eyes. "I'm gonna miss you so much, Jon."

"I'm gonna miss you too, Que," Jonathan said wiping his own tears away.

"Promise to visit Chicago sometime," Queenie said. "It's gotta a lot of beautiful landmarks to take pictures of."

Jonathan laughed slightly. "I promise to visit Chicago."

Queenie turned to Joyce Byers. "Bye, Joyce. I'm gonna miss you." Queenie took Joyce into a hug.

Joyce smiled at the taller woman. "Bye Queenie. We'll miss you too."

"Good luck," Queenie whispered turning back to the kids.

"Mike," Queenie reached into her pocket. "I want to give you something." She held up her brother's sun pendant. "In some myths, the sun and moon were twins, but in others, they were in love. And every night the sun would die, so the moon could shine. I hope this will help you remember that you and Elle will always be together no matter how far apart y'all are."

Mike smiled hugging Queenie. "Thank you."

"Dusty," Queenie bent down beside him. "Steve and I can be your fake Mormon parents to take you to see Suzie, just let us know when." Queenie chuckled as Dustin hit her teasingly.

"Lucas," Queenie hugged him. "Let me know if you need a break from Erica."

"Max," Queenie hugged her and placed a kiss on her head. "You'll

always be my little sister. No matter what." A tear fell from both their eyes. "So you come to me anytime you need."

"Will," Queenie gave Will a kiss on the cheek. "Will, if anyone, ever, gives you shit, tell me and I'll beat them up for you."

"Elle," Queenie cupped her tear-stained face. "Remember the moon provides light in the darkness. You provide light in the darkness."

Queenie turned from them wiping her teary eyes. "Come on, Stevie. Let's take Robin home then go get Dad."

"Wait," Nancy said running over to hug her friend. "Where are you going?"

"Oh," Queenie smiled softly through her tears. "We're taking him to meet Mom and Dom. I'm sure they'll love him."

Steve smiled taking her hand. "I already love them, so they better love me."

Queenie laughed looking to her boyfriend lovingly. Steve handed Mr. Mistoffelees to Robin through the car window. He pulled Queenie close and gave her a long, loving kiss.